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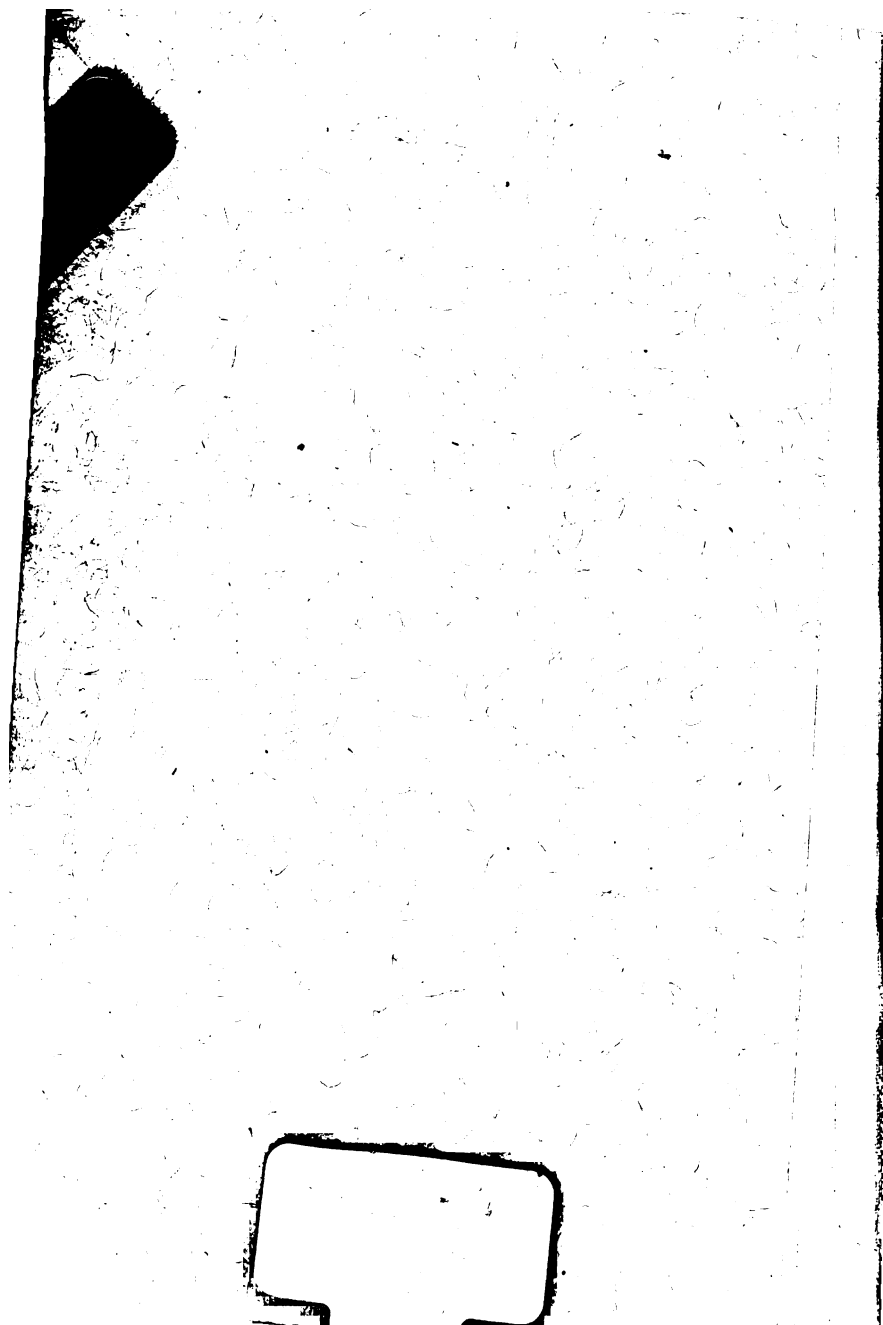
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BY

MAY CROMMELIN

AUTHOR OF

"THE FREAKS OF LADY FORTUNE," ETC., ETC.

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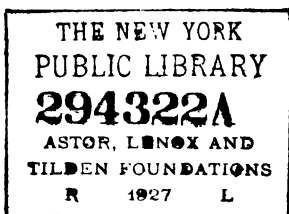
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FOR THE SAKE OF THE FAMILY.

CHAPTER I.

“MISS SMITH! *Miss Smith!*”

The girl addressed did not seem to hear, although she was standing, at no great distance, at the side of the ship, for she was gazing with all her eyes at Plymouth's fair harbour as it receded from view, and Mount Edgcumbe's glorious green woods dipping into the salt waves.

“*Miss Smith!!*” was reiterated for the third time in angry tones, and the speaker bustled forward.

She was a thin lady, of elegant, but faded, appearance, and with too large a head and long a face for the rest of her body.

“Will you be good enough to go and arrange my cabin before I come down there?”

“Oh, I really beg your pardon, Aunt Honoria, I—”

“Hu-sh-sh!”

The sibilant whisper was accompanied by an utterly freezing glance. At this the girl blushed, as if slapped on both cheeks, and meekly disappeared down the companion ladder.

Another passenger had been watching this little scene with a slightly amused interest. His admiration had been excited by the now vanished Miss Smith for the last quarter of an hour; and, although he could not overhear, he marked the brief interview narrated.

“A fine girl! How strong and tall she is! Just the sort of a girl who has been brought up with brothers, I should say, and can ride, and row, and play tennis, probably, as well as any of them.”

So thinking, our passenger sauntered up to the irate little lady, who still held her head victoriously high.

“I hope you are a good sailor, Lady Wayland,” he began, pleasantly; “for our captain says we shall have a bit of a breeze soon.”

A dismayed expression changed Lady Wayland’s features with amusing rapidity.

"Oh, Mr. Ingham, you don't say so! I declare, I almost wish my husband had never accepted this South African governorship. First of all, I am one of the most wretched sailors alive, and when we do get out there, there will be a very few ladies for me to speak to, I believe."

"You are taking out a young lady, I see. May I ask who she is? "

"Who—Miss Smith?" in a tone of surprised asperity. "She is only my companion."

"Indeed !"

"*Poor Miss Smith,*" thought Randall Ingham; but, instead of saying so, he praised Sir Horatio's colonial policy.

Presently the gentleman in question came fussing up; a good-natured little person of some pomposity, which last could be reduced to nothingness by a word or a look from his wife acting like a pin-prick on a child's silken bladder.

"How are you feeling—how are you feeling, my dear?" he began. "And where is Rachel, eh? Where is Rachel, I say? "

"Miss Smith has gone below—and I am going."

That was all ; but Lady Wayland's air of rebuke was quite sufficient. A greenish pallor was overspreading her features, as the good ship plunged and curtsayed as she met with and greeted the waves. But her ladyship held her head high until the top of her bonnet disappeared, and her spouse meekly trotted after her, looking subdued.

"Now, I wonder," thought Ingham to himself, "why the little governor should call Miss Smith—his wife's companion—Rachel?"

Randall Ingham was a man slightly below middle height, but he had sufficient breath and strength of appearance, besides a good carriage, to prevent him from being thought short ; and his features were pleasant enough, with kindly smiles often playing about his mouth, although there was almost a pathetic expression at times in his blue eyes, which seldom twinkled, that seemed to suggest either past or dormant suffering. His hair was the only remarkable feature of his person ; it was grey, indeed, silver white in patches, forming a singular contrast to his fresh complexion and brown moustache, which belonged rightly to a man of his age, that is to say,

past the ten-milestone of thirty and within sight of that of forty. This phenomenon was due to the one misfortune that had caused all the later trials in his life. Just before leaving public school, as a fine lad of seventeen, abreast of the best in his studies, captain of the cricket eleven, and a favourite with masters and boys, the blow fell. He was knocked down in a foot-ball scrimmage, and received a kick on the head which brought on brain-fever. Through weary weeks he lay in darkness, with ice on his head, while his widowed mother nursed her darling, the pride of her heart, almost without a ray of hope. The doctors were unanimous that, if the boy lived, which was doubtful, he would be an idiot. They were wrong. Mother's love so far triumphed over sickness and death that Randall slowly recovered, though for two years he was forced to remain a useless burden upon his mother's slender resources ; and idle, as the only alternative to being ill. The end of it was that Ingham went out to Ceylon, where he invested his little patrimony in a coffee plantation. Bad seasons followed, and when, at the end of eight years, an uncle died and left him a small but suffi-

cient fortune, on which he could live comfortably with economy, he returned gladly to Old England. Since then Ingham's existence had been as retired and tranquil as that of a spinster without a purpose in life. The climate of Ceylon had sapped his strength considerably, so that he was unfitted for hunting, shooting, politics, or Society's late hours and stifling rooms.

He travelled a good deal, often to health-resorts, fished, took up photography. Just now he was starting on a sea voyage, partly for health's sake, round the Cape to Ceylon, where also some important business required his presence concerning the coffee plantation which he had left in charge of his partner.

CHAPTER II.

FOR two or three days it blew "half a gale," as sailors say. In the opinion of Lady Wayland, and most of the passengers, however, it was a dreadful storm, and all the ladies, and most of the men, lay groaning in the berths—all the former with one exception, and that was Rachel. She was never ill, and this ought to have made her a pearl of companions in Lady Wayland's eyes, one would think; but the dame only querulously closed those organs of vision on Rachel's smiling appearance beside her couch of sea-sickness, and would snap from between her half-closed teeth:

"Oh, do go away! it only makes me worse to know that you must be made without any inside; really, you could apply for the berth of a stewardess, if all else fails."

Upon which poor Rachel would retire abashed into

the saloon, and sit by herself, trying to read, as her sofa swayed to the ship's motion. But not for long. Mr. Ingham was sure to espy her from some other corner where he sat, likewise alone. Had any spiteful or gossiping busybodies been present, they might have said he was watching for her ; but only some tough old sea-dogs, as they liked to call themselves, of passengers had found their sea-legs those days, and, bless their hearts ! they smiled kindly on the pair in question, when by chance they noticed these recurring dialogues :

“ Will you not come up on deck ? I will take care of you,” Ingham would generally say. “ It is more healthy for you than staying down here, I am sure ; and we shall have enough of the saloon in the evening, sha’n’t we ? ”

“ Yes ; though I don’t dislike it by any means ; but I do love best to be up on deck, of course,” replied Rachel joyously, yet shyly. She certainly had enjoyed the last two or three evenings keenly, down here in a comfortable corner, with Mr. Ingham by turns talking to her or playing games, over which they both laughed as happily as a pair of children ;

but to be up on deck in the fresh air, with him beside her, was still more exhilarating. "How I love the voyage!" she would repeat to him. "Oh, I hope it will always be like this! I should not mind if it lasted for six months."

"It may be different when Lady Wayland gets better," Ingham would smilingly reply, and then be sorry he had so jested, when he saw a slightly apprehensive expression momentarily shadow Rachel's generally blithe young face.

Once up on deck, they stayed side by side, for an hour or two at a time, engrossed in conversation. Sir Horace never interfered. Now and again he would trot past them—for he was one of the "sea-dogs"—and nod with condescending affability to Rachel.

"Ah! in very good care, I see. Honoria asked me what you were doing, so I can say you are enjoying yourself, my de—— Ahem!" and the colonial governor cleared his throat loudly.

"Miss Wayland," said another of the passenger sea-salts, coming up with a spy-glass under his arm, and thinking to attract the notice of the prettiest girl

on board for a minute or two, whom he imagined to be Sir Horace's daughter, "there is a sail in sight over yonder. Would you like to take a look at it?"

Rachel turned instantly with a pleased smile, and peered through his spy-glass, chatting with the old fellow pleasantly.

When the latter was gone, Randall Ingham approached her again with an amused look.

"I begin to believe that you do not know your own name. I have noticed several times that you do not seem to notice when you are called 'Miss Smith,' but that you bound at the name of **Wayland**."

"Pride, pride—all pride," laughed Rachel, staring seawards. "You may think that pride and Lady Wayland's companion have no right to be associated; still, 'Poor and proud' is a proverbial phrase, is it not?"

"Heaven forbid that I should apply it to you!" returned Ingham very gently under his breath. "Why, you are rich in all that makes life worth having; in youth, health, and strength, and, I will make bold to guess, in friends who really love you."

"Ah! yes, I am a lucky girl in that last good for-

time," agreed Rachel, her voice softening, too, while a half-regretful smile lit up her bonny face. "They did make so much of me just before I sailed, when I was staying down at St. Ermin's."

"What! do you know St. Ermin's? I used to go there as a boy, but I have not seen it for a long time. Do you belong to that neighbourhood?" asked Ingham, roused to unusual curiosity, although he was always deeply interested in his companion.

"I was staying there last," returned Rachel evasively. "Before that I was at Boulogne, teaching in a school."

"*You* teaching!"

Somehow the idea of associating Rachel with desk drudgery, with smeared copy-books and piano scales, seemed almost absurd to Ingham.

"Yes, I am a dunce; you have found out that already," she returned quickly. "No, no; do not say anything. I only like the truth, not compliments."

In his heart Ingham thought her the dearest girl alive, but she had not struck him as deep thinking, or even particularly intellectual.

"You see, it is like this," hurried on Rachel.

“We are a large family—I won’t say ‘worse luck,’ as we all love each other dearly; but there are too many of us. Most of the others are little, so of course I have had to do my best, bad though it was. Lady Wayland knew this, and it is most kind of her to take me out as a companion. Now you know all my history.”

Not quite all, Rachel! In afterdays both you and Randall Ingham will regret the few unspoken words of confidence which might have changed much in the currents of your two lives.

But the girl thought she had said enough; and, after all, what did the rest matter to him? Randall Ingham, too, believed he quite understood.

On the fourth day the so-called “half-gale,” had increased to a whole one. It was very stormy; but Rachel, who felt dizzy and a little frightened, had ventured herself up on deck, as usual, clinging fast hold of Ingham’s arm with one hand, and of an equally friendly, but less impressionable, brass rail with the other.

“Hold fast!” cried Ingham, as a large wave broke over the ship’s side, half blinding both of them in a

shower of spray. "This is really dangerous; I ought never to have brought you up here to-day; but you over-persuaded me."

"Do not repent of a kind action," laughed Rachel gleefully. "It was so dismal down in the saloon, with only my——, with only Sir Horace and the other old gentlemen, holding themselves into their chairs, and lecturing on politics; besides, it is a rare opportunity for me of feeling superior to the rest of the passengers. Fancy what they miss, poor souls! groaning in their berths, while I am enjoying this grand sight; you would not grudge me such a pleasure? Oh, look; look at it all!"

She was looking herself with all her eyes at the green, liquid mountains of waves that reared themselves and broke tumultuously on all sides.

"Grudge you a pleasure—a single pleasure! Certainly not!" said Ingham emphatically under his breath.

He just stopped some other words in time on his tongue that were impulsively rushing to the threshold of speech. With a little start at his own daring of thought, he looked askance at Rachel, who

was still drinking in the glorious tumult of the elements with all her eyes.

“Now we go up, up, up!” she cried, laughing, as the good ship rose on the crest of a great wave; “and now we go down, down, down!” as it slid into a watery valley.

What a picture of rich young health and beauty the girl was! Under her little blue sailor cap her dark brown hair was blown by the winds in fluffy stray locks and rebellious curls; one longer strand escaped wholly from bondage, and was swept now and then lightly against his cheek. Rachel did not know it, and Ingham did not speak. There was a light in her large grey eyes, while sweet red roses were blooming on her cheeks, it did his heart good to see. Her long cloak was wrapt closely about her tall figure by the gale, outlining its really noble proportions.

“What a glorious creature she is!” Ingham was feeling rather than thinking. He could not coolly criticise her to himself, he could only wholly, passionately admire. The truth was, that Randall Ingham was head over ears in love. His quiet life

of late, his long exile abroad before, had prevented him from knowing more than a few women intimately ; there had been some calf-loves long ago, to which he had looked back sentimentally, supposing that never more should he feel that old enthusiasm. But now—Love had come upon him with a rush, almost blinding, overwhelming. “Hold hard, hold hard !” he kept dully repeating to himself. “How this girl would laugh at you if she ever knew your folly ! She may be only a companion, but she is magnificent, and youth will to youth. She would laugh at the notion of a poor, invalided, grey-haired veteran like myself even thinking of her.”

But even at the thought his blood raced in his veins, throbbed in his ears, and a dull red flush crept into his face.

Meanwhile, Rachel was unconsciously gaily humming the words,

“In the Bay of Biscay O.”

Without a moment’s warning came a great crash ; it seemed under their very feet. The ship quivered from stem to stern as from a violent blow. In an-

other second there was a hurrying rush of officers and crew along the deck, followed by a second up-rush of frightened passengers. A clamour and babel of calls and cries, hoarse order and replies, of shrieking questions and bewildered answers, filled the air.

“Oh, what is it?” whispered Rachel, clinging faster to Ingham’s arm, speaking calmly, but quite low, in her fright.

“There is an accident! Heavens knows what!”

“Is there danger?”

CHAPTER III.

ABOVE all the clamour of the terrified passengers on board the *Oceana*, the captain's voice sounded a loud and cheery note of reassurance.

"Our shaft is broken, ladies and gentlemen ; but as to danger—Pooh ! set your minds at ease. Why, you are all as safe as if in your own beds at home. it is bad luck, I own, for any of us who are in a hurry to get to the Cape, but just think how far worse it might have been. We may all be very thankful that this has happened on board one of the finest screw steamers afloat, constructed on such magnificent new principles that she can almost defy the elements to sink her." Then, surrounded by an eager group pressing round to hear his words of encouragement, the captain went on to explain, while Lady Wayland, who had caught hold of his sleeve by an outstretched finger and thumb, was hanging

upon every word that came from his clean-shaven lips: "You see, my dear ladies—*you* understand, gentlemen—that this ship is not only divided into water-tight compartments, but also has a longitudinal bulkhead which practically divides her in two throughout her length. Now this is almost as near perfection as can be. For——"

"Wh-ish sh-sh!"

Even as he spoke a great cloud of steam suddenly burst up from underneath, enveloping them all; it was accompanied with a grinding noise and violent blows. Fresh shrieks arose from the affrighted women, while those terrible thuds continued. Even all the men looked scared; not that they could well see each other's faces for a moment or two. As the cloud of steam dissipated, the chief engineer rushed into the group with a pale face and drew the captain aside, who was obliged to extricate himself with difficulty from Lady Wayland's tenacious grip by pushing her into the arms of Sir Horace with kindly force.

A fresh accident had occurred, which the chief engineer was now reporting to the captain. The cause

of it was as follows: The *Oceana* had twin screws, as has been said. When the shaft broke, the port engine connected to it, having practically no work to do, revolved for a brief space of time with frightful velocity, breaking the piston rod and causing the gearing to be hurled in all directions, perforating the bulkhead which separated it from its fellow, and tearing a large hole in the bottom of the ship.

Ingham had done good service in quieting the fears of many of his fellow-passengers, and in assuring and demonstrating to them that whatever might happen to the machinery, although the ship might float like a log, there was no real reason for alarm. He even, *mirabile dictu!* had the coolness to go to where Lady Wayland sobbed hysterically apart, with a request, as from the captain, that she, being the lady of the highest position of those on board, should set the example of courage and firmness to the others. And my lady actually wiped her eyes, and with some sounds like suppressed snorts desired Rachel hereupon—

“There, now! Don’t bother me any more. You hear what Mr. Ingham says. Go down to my cabin

and make yourself useful. You can pack up all my jewellery and bring it to me here. I shall not stir from the deck, where I can see whatever happens."

Even though guessing at the danger that surrounded them, Rachel could not suppress a smile as she stood behind her employer, who had so lately been sobbing helplessly in the girl's arms. She went obediently below; but not alone. For Ingham found a pretext to follow her and whisper warm praises of her courage and cool behaviour, that gladdened Rachel's heart almost as much as his cheering prophecies concerning the ship's accident.

Now, with an unusually alert manner and quiet smile, Randall was asking of the captain :

"Do you mind telling me what is really the matter? I have not a notion myself; but I have been assuring all the others that we are as right as a trivet. I fancy you look as if something was wrong, nevertheless."

"I am afraid you are right, Mr. Ingham. Thank you for your kind help with the passengers, all the same."

"But why? What is the danger, when the watertight compartments are holding good, they say, and

the doors are shut? The engine-room, too, which must be full of water to the sea-level, I conclude, is isolated nevertheless from the rest of the ship."

"Quite true," whispered the captain hurriedly. "But, you see, the pressure of the water may burst in those bulkheads, now the longitudinal support on which we reckoned is gone, since the port-engine played the devil with it. No need to tell the others that, however. I can trust *you*, I know. Still, they may hold out for a bit, and—God helping us!—if the breeze freshens no more, I will sail the ship back into Plymouth harbour."

The captain gallantly kept his word; and, as if in encouragement of his seamanship and pluck, the fates ordained that the wind did lessen. It had been against the *Oceana* during her three or four days of voyage out; now being in her favour, although their speed was slow, still, after five days, they found themselves nearing the English coast, which was, as is so often the case, shrouded from view by a slight fog.

"I wonder shall we get in safely to Plymouth once more?" said Rachel in an undertone of con-

fidence. Her remark was addressed to Ingham, who was, as usual, by her side whenever Lady Wayland's querulousness allowed her young companion a few minutes of freedom from attending continually upon the Governor's wife's wants. "I heard the first lieutenant saying that the wind seemed to be getting up again, and that he only hoped we might not have it worse before long."

"I should not regret a bit of a storm myself," whispered Ingham, with unconscious tenderness, as he looked in her face, "if it only had the same result as before of keeping some people in their berths. Still, even for such a blessed result, we ought not to wish for wind, for the *Oceana* is hardly as weather-tight as she was."

Rachel looked shyly down. She felt fluttered when her fellow-passenger gave her these rare looks which made her feel that her safety, and even present comfort, were more to him than the well-being of all the rest of those on board.

"He is such a real friend, I do believe. He is so kind and sympathising," she said in her heart. "I have never met any man yet to whom I could speak

so easily, and tell just all I felt, excepting dear old father."

Whether Randall Ingham would have been flattered at being thus compared with Rachel's father is unlikely. But he never knew it, for she only replied aloud :

" Misfortunes generally come in threes. We have had two already. I am afraid it is time to look out for the third."

Before very long Rachel's homely philosophy proved correct. The wind freshened more and more. By night-time, as they were near the Cornish coast, it had become a storm. Darkness surrounded them, through which the white tops of the waves could only just be descried. The wind whistled through the rigging, as if mocking at the moaning cries that now and again issued from one or other of the women's cabins as some greater wave than usual struck the vessel's side. But the worst danger to the ill-fated *Oceana* lay within her own wooden walls ; for the water that filled the engine-room, oscillating frightfully with the movement of the ship, dashed continually with frightful violence against

the bulkheads. Alas! the latter, upon which the hopes of the captain and crew had been pinned, were minute by minute losing their power for protection. The massive steel plates were becoming buckled and bulged outwards under the strain. The captain, his officers and crew, were aware of the danger, as hour by hour it grew, and that their chance of safety lessened while the ship laboured, attacked from without and within.

As night came on the men cabin passengers were told the true state of affairs, and they all kept their clothes on and stayed up in case of emergency. But as yet none of the women were warned, although most of them lay awake in their berths dreading danger, though not aware that its worst crisis might be so soon.

When an hour had thus passed, the chief engineer and the captain held a brief consultation.

"We must get the women and children up, and prepare for the worst," they agreed. "There is nothing left for it but to take to the boats."

CHAPTER IV.

"THANK you, thank you," Rachel simply said, as they stood on the sinking ship, taking the hand again that Randall Ingham held out to her, with an artless beseeching that went straight to his heart. "May I stay by you? For I think I shall be less frightened to die if some one I know is near me—I mean a friend; and you have been a good friend to me these days. Perhaps, if there is another boat, there is just a chance we might go in it together."

"We will, if there is one," replied Ingham, soothingly, holding her hand in a tighter clasp. After that for long minutes they waited silently, side by side.

Then came their chance. They were both called for and helped into the last boat, and found themselves sitting beside each other; while Randall

again, as if it was natural, put out his hand and closed it protectingly over the smaller one that nestled instinctively within his own.

The sailors bent to their oars, and away they shot from the black hull that towered above them, out into the darkness, up upon the crest of great dark waves, then down into still more awful valleys of liquid blackness.

Rachel prayed silently between her parted lips as they committed themselves unto the deep. Perhaps Ingham was praying too.

Their boat was a good one, but whether it could live long in that tremendous sea was doubtful, and at any moment they might be swamped. The wind tore the tops of the waves off the water, and drove the salt scud in their faces as they sat with bowed heads, half blinded.

At last Rachel spoke, calmly; Ingham felt her breath upon his cheek, she had to bend so near to make him hear.

"I am glad that I am not more afraid. Is it not strange that one can be so calm? And yet I feel that we two may be in eternity at any moment."

“Dear, we are always in eternity,” he said, wishing he could distinguish her features better in the gloom. “This life is only a phase, a stage of the journey, and we do not know the nature of the next one, that is all. But we were somewhere in eternity before we were born, and are in it now ; and, as we trust in our Saviour, shall be in it in the coming life.”

A minute or two later, he took off his own pea-jacket, and insisted with kindly but forcible hands that Rachel must put it on.

“You must not die of cold, if we are saved,” he persisted, with a little laugh in his voice that made the tears spring into the girl’s eyes. “Poor child ! I am so sorry for you, with your young life just beginning, and, no doubt, you looked forward to long years that might be full of happiness. But I am middle-aged, and pretty well tired of my journey, which has had more thorns than flowers growing on its path. There is no one to miss me ; perhaps I ought to be glad to know that if I die to-night I shall hardly be missed.”

“No ! but it is sad to feel so solitary. Do not

say that, for if we were not together—I mean, if I lived, I should regret you very, very much. But I could be well spared, too. It is a comfort to think that it is I, and not my elder sister, who may be lost to those at home.”

“You be well spared! Impossible! How could your own family be such heartless——?”

“Hush! hush! They love me dearly, but there are so many of us, and father is so poor. If I go there is one less to feed and clothe, don’t you see? . . . Of course, I am young and fond of life, but life only means drudging as Lady Wayland’s companion for the next five or seven years, far from home or friends. She does not treat me as her equal. I will not associate with servants. I shall be lonely.”

Ingham’s heart leapt up.

(A strange thing to say of a man who seemed drifting to death in that open boat—but with the girl he loved beside him. She had spoken with gentle bitterness; resigned but not content to face her destiny of slow withering in obscurity and neglect.) Ingham had never before understood how

very poor and friendless this girl was. The excess of his love for her had so far kept him silent. Now he spoke.

“Rachel,” he said, fervently, “if you and I live to reach land, will you marry me? Our cases seem somewhat alike, or I should not venture to ask you to try and care for me.”

Rachel turned her head slowly. She could not read his face in the darkness, yet somehow she felt that, like herself, he felt death around them.

“I will,” she answered, solemnly and simply, “if it pleases God to spare our lives. And I do care for you already; you have been so good to me.”

The wind lessened, but only to yield place to a thick mist that came sweeping up channel. It was impossible to see a yard. The damp cold chilled them to the bones. And so the night passed.

CHAPTER V.

SLOWLY, mysteriously, the fog began to roll away in woolly masses. First a few yards of cold greenish sea became visible to the weary night-watchers in the boat, then more ; little by little they could see further around ; at last a shaft of light burst through the receding veil of haze that still surrounded their limited horizon. It broadened, brightened ; the mists fled away, and they saw the dawn. Land was visible now in a dark coast-line, touched here and there into green and yellow by the sun's rays. The weary boatmen once more sat up and took to their oars, rowing toilsomely towards the shore. They did not hope to reach it before two or three hours, but the sight of it put fresh life into them all. Then it was Rachel who first of all spied a fishing-smack far away over the tumbling waters. A signal of knotted

handkerchiefs was tied to an oar, and eked out by a red worsted comforter.

There, Heaven be thanked ! the smack had seen them, and, changing its course, was presently alongside of the boat. In a few minutes they were all on board, welcomed by kindly, though horny hands ; comforted with exclamations of pity and words of good cheer.

Rachel, as the only woman in the boat, had her wants first supplied. They persuaded her to swallow a few drops of brandy, that made her throat burn, but revived her, nevertheless ; then she preferred some strong black tea, without milk or sugar, that was brewed for her over the little stove.

Delicious ! it seemed to thaw the blood in her half-frozen veins, and the fishermen laughed as she feebly praised it ; while Ingham watched her reviving with a glad sense of proprietorship.

The smack put back to a small fishing-port on the Cornish coast. It was like a dream to both Randall and Rachel as, still dizzy and confused, they set foot on the shingle, and were questioned and pitied

by half a hundred voices. Next they were driven gratis by a friendly landlord to the railway station and started in the train for Plymouth. Presently they were told by a fat guard, who had seen the morning's paper, that the missing boats of the *Oceana*, with the Waylands and the rest of the passengers, had been picked up the night before. (All the crew, indeed, were saved, both captain and officers, though this they did not learn till later.)

As Rachel and Ingham sat back opposite each other in the train, with stubble-fields, homesteads, and hedgerows flying past them, it seemed like a dream. Both were too exhausted to say much, only now and again Randall bent forward to wrap a rug closer round his companion's knees, for she shivered at times. Then Rachel would raise her heavy-lidded eyes and try to smile.

"You are ill, I fear, my dearest," he whispered once or twice.

"I only feel dull and numb," she answered wearily; "it will pass soon. But you—you are not well yourself."

This was true, for Ingham felt the sharp aches of

muscular rheumatism, and kept stirring uneasily with pain.

Once more they found themselves in Plymouth, most thankful to be saved, to be alive; yet, in Rachel's case, vaguely disheartened.

"It is wrong to be superstitious, I know," she explained apoloisingly to Randall, who had taken her hand and was holding it, while a solitary considerate fellow-passenger looked out of the opposite window, "but this beginning of the voyage seems like a bad omen to me. Just think how gaily, a few days ago, our ship went out of port. How little we thought then that we should be wrecked, and find ourselves back again, half-clothed and half-dead!"

"Who would have thought, too, that we were fated to meet each other; that henceforward in life, as I trust, we shall never be parted? We have been wrecked together and saved together, and are, I believe, destined to spend a long and happy life together," was Randall's rejoinder, lovingly uttered, in spite of sharp twinges of agony.

Who should meet them at the station but Sir Horace himself? News of their coming had been tele-

graphed ahead, and the worthy man was strutting up and down the platform, surrounded by a little group of eagerly interested companions, to whom he was recounting the disaster with even more than his usual importance.

“God bless my soul! My dear girl, I am glad to have you back, and so will your—ahem! and so will her ladyship be. And Ingham, too; you are going to the hotel, I suppose? But, bless my heart! what a figure of fun you are, my poor girl. I’ve got a close carriage for you; come along. Our luggage will be saved, thank Heaven. The ship is stuck fast on the rocks, they say; two tugs been out this morning to see her—they are going to take off the cargo. All’s well that ends well, eh?”

A week later Ingham, who had been ill and in bed during the intervening time, was visited by Sir Horace in his bedroom. The latter brought the news that a fresh ship was sailing the next day.

“We are all going, and I hope, my dear fellow, you will be well enough, too,” he good-naturedly announced. “My wife declared at first that nothing would induce her to set foot on a ship again, but, as

I told her, she is evidently not born to be drowned, and we cannot yet get to South Africa overland. Ha! ha! ha! What! you are going?"

"Yes. I shall be all right; I shall be ready to start," eagerly acquiesced Randall, raising himself in his arm-chair with some pain but reviving energy. "And how is Miss Smith?"

He was conscious of a perceptible falter in his voice, and an eagerness in his face which he could hardly disguise.

"Oh, she will be all right soon," returned Sir Horace, gazing at the sick man a little curiously. "She has been upset, poor girl, of course; but I say the sea-breezes will soon put her on her legs again."

The kind-hearted colonial governor wished to cheer up the invalid, guessing that the latter took more than a passing interest in Lady Wayland's handsome lady-companion; and, indeed, with him the wish was father to the thought.

Next day, therefore, Ingham was half-supported, half-carried on board ship, and installed in his cabin under the doctor's care.

In the hurry and confusion of departure he did not see the Waylands' party, to his deep disappointment. But he heard that they were all on board, and fairly well, for the weather had moderated, and the dreaded Bay was now as smooth as if the late storm had been but a ghastly dream.

CHAPTER VI.

WHEN, some days later, Ingham, looking pale and weak, but still with a light of glad expectancy in his face, made his way, for the first time this trip, up on deck, he saw Sir Horace taking his constitutional by himself to and fro. Lady Wayland was seated amongst some other ladies who were reading and gossiping together in their deck-chairs; but no sight of Rachel's handsome figure, no blink of her bonny eyes, met her lover's keenly searching glance.

"And she was not in the saloon," thought he to himself, with a blank disappointment stealing over him which surely was absurd.

He turned towards Sir Horace, who (or so he fancied) seemed rather to avoid him, having not once been to his cabin in person, although sending inquiries.

"Hullo, Ingham ! that's right—up again ! Charming weather, is not it ?"

"Quite so," said Ingham, briefly. Then, coming straight to his point, for he wished to have no secret from the Waylands on the subject of his relations to Rachel, "How is Miss Smith ? I did not see her on deck, and am anxious to know how she is getting over our joint misadventures."

"Ah, poor girl, poor girl ! I do not know how she is exactly, but I fear not as well as I hoped," and Wayland wagged his head with real regret.

"Where is she ? In her cabin ?"

"No, no. We had to leave her behind in Plymouth, I grieve to say."

"What ! Good heavens ! Why, you told me yourself she was coming on board."

All the blood in his body seemed to rush up to Ingham's brain, his veins swelled, while an angry light came in his eyes. He felt as if he had been tricked, duped, and she, poor child, lying hundreds of miles behind him there, while he was on this ship moving ever swiftly further away from her.

"It was not my fault ; I fully trusted and thought

she would be able to come, but it seems that she was in for rheumatic fever, and my lady declared it was impossible to bring her. Of course it was."

"So you left her alone—in a strange town!" echoed Ingham, dully.

"What could I—what could either of us do?" returned Sir Horace, aggrieved, feeling unjustly, if dumbly, accused.

"May I ask where she comes from—who her people are?" went on Randall, trying to hide the rage that boiled up within him, not so much against Sir Horace as against fate.

"Hum! I do not know exactly that I can say," huffily responded the little governor, his bristles rising. "Lady Wayland saw that she was left in good hands."

"She said she had friends at St. Ermin's," pursued Ingham, partly to himself.

"Ah! she told you that, did she? Well, of course, they have been written to by my lady, so do not distress yourself unnecessarily on her account. I am personally—we are both very sorry, I mean, that she could not come out with us; very! She is a

dear good girl, but she was ill; and there was an end of it. Luckily for my wife, we found another lady at the Governesses' Home in Plymouth ready and willing for the voyage—— Excuse me, I see my wife signing to me."

Away trotted the little man, leaving Ingham moodily staring over the ship's side. He felt dizzy at the disappointment. What a trick fortune had played him!

"My old luck!" he bitterly reiterated. "The only creature I have seen to love in all these barren years, and the one woman on earth whom I have ever wished to make my wife, left behind!"

The worst of it was it seemed his own fault. Had he not taken Sir Horace's word so readily, if he had only been less shy in inquiring of the steward on board concerning Miss Smith, he would have stayed himself in Plymouth. That would have been infinitely better than even going out on the voyage together. And yet he remembered having asked the steward and hearing that Lady Wayland's companion, Miss Smith, was well. He turned below

abruptly in his wrath to ask the reason of the man having misled him.

"Miss Smythe, sir?" repeated the nimble, dapper steward. "Yessir, all right. There she is, sir, coming out of Lady Wayland's cabin."

And Ingham saw a second Miss Smith or Smythe, a stiff, melancholy person, with "governess" stamped on her every long-suffering feature. What a grotesque shadow of his own darling high-spirited girl!

Meanwhile, Lady Wayland was questioning her lord.

"Seemed very vexed, did you say? There! I told you so; that girl was a thorough flirt, and I should have had no peace with her on the voyage. Been a good thing for her, do you say? Pshaw!" (this witheringly) "the man was only amusing himself!"

An hour or two later Ingham was cheering himself with the thought:

"Well, it need not be so long a separation after all; I will write back to her from Madeira. In any case there might have been difficulties about our getting married at the Cape. That dreadful woman

had probably bound her on oath not to marry for a year; employers do something of the sort, I believe. I will write this minute, this very minute."

He did so; and pouring out his heart on paper relieved him greatly. He little guessed that the letter, fraught full with his passionate love, his distress of mind, his trouble and anxiety concerning Rachel, was fated never to reach her.

He had addressed it to the care of the proprietor of the hotel where the Waylands had been staying, asking the man to forward it should the lady have left, and to reply to him at the Cape.

On reaching the latter port he waited three weeks, then the hoped-for reply came, *enclosing his own letter back again.*

The hotel-keeper wrote that the young lady had been taken away, to lodgings he supposed, before the Waylands had left. No address had been given, and he did not know her whereabouts.

CHAPTER VII.

IN a ward of the Plymouth Hospital, on a little white bed like its nineteen or twenty neighbours, Rachel was lying. Lady Wayland had brought her here three days ago, with the harsh reminder that, as for the sake of her family the invalid could not afford the expense of lodgings, there was no other course to be taken.

Of her own free will, the girl would have said the same ; but somehow it seemed hard to be hustled here and there in haste, without even her consent being asked.

“ How angry father would be if he knew ! ” was Rachel’s bitter self-consolation, as the tears welled up in her eyes and she bit her lips. “ But he must never know,” was the second thought.

His children made it a point of honour to spare Hilary Wayland’s sensitive, fiery nature ; while his

elder daughters even pretended—and that successfully—that they rather enjoyed some of the aspects of poverty, notably their freedom from social duties, as they termed society's pleasures, and enforced light skirmishing in the battle of life.

A nurse came down the passage between the beds this warm September afternoon, with a light step.

"Can I do anything for you, my dear?" she asked, pausing beside Rachel's bed, seeing the girl's eyes watching her with a mutely entreating expression. "You are in a great deal of pain, I am afraid? Ah, I thought so, you can hardly bear the touch of the sheet. There, let me settle it so for you."

"That is better," with faltering tongue, whispered the patient.

As it happened, the nurse knew about this young lady's escape from the wrecked ship in an open boat. One of the other passengers—a Mr. Ingham—had been very kind to her, Rachel now said, blushing. Could the nurse, perhaps, find out for her whether he had been very ill, and if he was better? He was staying at the hotel on the Hoe.

Of course! The nurse was going out herself for

her daily allowance of fresh air, and, guessing a romance, she smiled and nodded at the suffering girl.

That evening, Love's envoy returned with unwelcome news. Mr. Ingham had sailed in the same ship as Sir Horace and Lady Wayland. There was no message, no letter left for any one. The nurse had bethought herself to make quite sure of that.

"He has left me behind! without a word!" was Rachel's amazed thought.

Then bitterness succeeded to the first pure wonderment and indignation; last of all, that most luxurious of woes, self-pity. For half-an-hour she was still, as if asleep, and said never a word; then, somehow, big, slow tears began to come, and could not be stayed. She stifled her sobs, lest the others so near might be disturbed. After an hour or so, the nurse in charge noticed, however, by the heaving of her shoulders, that the sick girl was sobbing.

"Come now, cheer up, cheer up, dear," said this new attendant. "You are feeling lonely, I daresay, but you will soon hear from your friends. Why, this won't do, your fever will be ever so much higher to-night."

And so it was.

The next afternoon a young woman with an odd stoop of her shoulders, as if early accustomed to some weight of trouble, also owning a pleasing plain face and curiously appealing eyes, entered the ward and came up to Rachel's bedside.

"My poor, poor child, what you have gone through!" she said, pityingly, yet there was a matter-of-fact tone underneath. "Well, here I am now! Do not distress yourself; you will be all right soon and father and all the rest send heaps of love, and are so sorry for you.

"O, Marion!" gasped Rachel, gazing in the new-comer's face with eyes that seemed beseeching forgiveness. "Did you ever know such a thing? Here I am back again upon your hands, dear, like a bad halfpenny."

"Nothing of the sort," returned Marion, stoutly. "Why, I call you most lucky. For my part I should say Fortune has something much better in store for you than being exiled to South Africa, with Aunt Honoria for a companion."

"A companion!" and in her weakness Rachel

positively laughed, then groaned with pain. "Do not imagine she would ever have condescended to be my companion, Marion." Then her voice lowered itself to a whisper. "As soon as I joined her, she explained that I was to be called *Miss Smith*. The name of Wayland being the same as that of Uncle Horace, she said, might lead to unpleasant inquiries. She did not wish that her companion should be known as their niece."

"*What!*" Marion drew back and stared in utter incredulity at her younger sister.

"I assure you it was so. I was never allowed to call them aunt or uncle. And, O dear, the trouble I had to remember who was wanted when they used to call for *Miss Smith!*"

Marion was not allowed to disturb her sister this first day by much talking. Rachel's fever grew worse that night, and the crisis would not be for a day or so; yet luckily her youth and splendid health were on the girl's side, once a turn for the better did begin.

Marion explained apologetically to the sick girl, patting her hand the while:

"You won't mind if I must go home now, dear,

for a fortnight or so? Then when you are able to be moved, I am coming back for you."

"Yes, yes. O, don't mind me, Marion. How is poor mother? Has she had one of her attacks?"

"She may be having one about this time; you know they come periodically. I should have been with you a day sooner, dear, only that one was threatened. She seemed to guess some accident had happened, when she heard you were coming home; it is so hard to know how much to tell her, and what her mind can or cannot grasp. She was pleased and even cried with joy at your coming back; you were always her favourite."

Marion bravely concealed a little sigh. It was hard that she, who had been for years the devoted nurse of a trying invalid, whose reason had been partly impaired by repeated attacks of slow paralysis, should be viewed almost with dislike by the mother, to tend whom she had sacrificed her own youth, as also to the care of her younger brothers and sisters. But Marion, if at times inwardly morbid and sometimes outwardly melancholy, was an unselfish creature.

CHAPTER VIII.

WHEN after three weeks Marion returned to fetch her sister home, she found the sick girl certainly almost recovered. Rachel was sitting up among the convalescents, and had even been twice out of doors in the sun.

"Still, you are not so strong, dear, as I had expected to find you," said Marion, with slight disappointment. "You seem to take this ill luck too much to heart. Cheer up! Why be so down-spirited because Uncle Horace and Aunt Honoria have left you behind?"

Rachel's under-lip twitched. Strong and well-grown though she was, the girl was as soft-hearted as a baby, and had not yet learnt life's lesson of self-control, being full of youthful impulses.

"I do not mind *their* leaving me in this fashion," she whispered, lest the other patients might over-

hear the sisters' confidences. "But there was some-one else on board."

"Some one else?" Marion's curiosity was fired at once. She lowered her voice, bent her head nearer, looked in her sister's face, and, being full of romance for Rachel—though she sternly lopped down its sprouting shoots in herself—she soon heard all the story of Randall Ingham's courtship. "And you are very fond of him, then? Why, Rachel, you only met him for a week!"

"What does that matter? I *am* very fond of him. He is the first man I have really cared about." And the warm blood stained the girl's pale velvety cheeks with a quickness betraying weakness of body. After all, why was it surprising? Randall Ingham had fallen in love at first sight with this girl who was such a splendid incarnation of youth, health, and fresh loveliness. Rachel, in return, was as willing as all young girls of that age to return the first love offered her when the lover was pleasant. It is only human nature. Perhaps she was in love with love but the fact remained, that as so far in her young life she had met no wooers beyond the Italian music-

master at the Boulogne school, sallow and long-haired, and a fiery little Belgian drawing-master, with a sandy, cropped head and freckles, who had both offered a devotion at which she only laughed—so it happened that Randall Ingham was her first lover, and she was head over ears in love with him. No doubt his kindliness, his refined manners, and the atmosphere of good breeding about him all had their influences, and were soothing to Rachel's mind, galled by Lady Wayland's treatment.

Marion sat amazed, recognising all this, but bewildered also by the fact that Ingham had sailed in such strange fashion. Then she asked, puckering her forehead into three deep, upright ridges between the eyebrows:

“Did you tell him that you were Miss Wayland, niece to Uncle Horace?”

“No,” owned poor Rachel, miserably; “I was keeping that back for a little—what d’y’e call it—*coup de théâtre*. I thought that, when he did ask aunt’s leave to marry her penniless companion, it would be such a pleasant surprise to find I was of good birth.”

"But, my child, he may not know who you are. It might make all the difference."

"No, no," sighed Rachel, apparently seeking suffocation by rolling her face round on the cushion beneath her head. Then turning it again just enough for speech, "If he did care for me, it would not matter to him one jot *who* I was; and if he spoke to Uncle Horace, he would very soon learn my real name and all about us."

"Yes, that is true," sadly acquiesced Marion. "Try not to think any more about him, dear. I fear he is unworthy. Men are so strange, one can never understand them. He may have been amusing himself."

Once more Rachel's cheeks showed the blood-red flag.

"That I cannot believe. Never! He is an honourable man, and he did love me. No there is some mystery, though we may never understand it."

"He may have left a note for you at the hotel," cried Marion, with sudden inspiration; and away she went to see for herself whether any letter had been left for Miss Smith or Miss Wayland.

Alas! the answer was still no! The reason was, of course, that she had gone to the *wrong hotel*, the one where the Waylands had stayed. The nurse having heard at Ingham's hotel that he had left no message on sailing, it never struck them he might write there later. Rachel only looked a little sadder for the inquiry, while her eyes had a new, far-away look.

Somehow she felt as if all that week at sea had been a dream.

Marion tried again to dissuade her young sister from thinking more of Ingham, for her sisterly affection perceived that Rachel would not recover quickly with this trouble preying on her mind; and Rachel resignedly acquiesced. But, with the captiousness and variable mind of woman, she began to take Ingham's part against his accuser. She was half-ashamed of herself for doing so, but secretly she still believed in him.

The next day, after a long railway journey, both girls arrived at the little road-side station in Kent that was nearest to the village of St. Ermin's. Rachel was weary, languid, and ashamed as a boy

who has failed in his public examination, and is returning home.

Outside the station there was waiting an omnibus from the St. Ermin's inn. It was crowded with women and babies, market-baskets and fat farmers.

"I could only keep one seat, Miss Wayland," said the driver, touching his cap to Marion. "Do you mind walking?"

At that moment up came an individual of some rural importance. He was a young man, stout and middle-sized, with a sleek black head and broad face; somewhat prominent eyes, and a mouth just thick-lipped enough to give a sensual impression. But he was brisk, well dressed, and as he bustled forward with a cheerful air, compared favourably with the little crowd of porters, farmers, and labouring men.

"Miss Wayland, surely you are not going in that old Noah's Ark?" he whispered, holding out an eager hand. "Do let me drive you in my trap; my groom can sit behind. See, there it is; my pony will take you home at the best pace you ever saw," and he looked round with a knowing nod at a handsome pony fretting in the shafts of a dog-cart.

"It is really very kind of you, Mr. Darke," hesitated Marion, looking pleased, for attentions from young men were rare with her; but unselfishness prevailed. "Only—would you mind taking my sister home instead of me? She is not very strong, and I shall mind the omnibus less. You have never met her yet, I think," as Darke took off his hat with rather a flourish to Rachel, his eyes slightly dilating.

"By Jove! what a beauty!" he thought. He felt fairly struck all of a heap as he looked at the tall, tired girl with her grand figure, her soft face white as a datura flower, and with little colour except in her pathetic grey eyes and sweet red lips.

"Why, of course, with pleasure; but you must both come," he eagerly declared. "O! on my word, Miss Wayland, I will take no refusal. I will sit behind with my groom if you will drive, only the pony pulls like the very devil—I beg your pardon. . . . What! you won't mind sitting behind with the groom? Thank you; how good of you! As your sister is not very well, perhaps she had better sit in front with me."

Richard, or "Dickie" Darke, as he was familiarly called about St. Ermin's, was delighted with his own cleverness in this little arrangement. He had invited Marion because he liked to show attentions to her as Miss Wayland, who was "a cut above most of the people in the neighbourhood, by Jove!" and "a peg or two" above himself also. He really liked her; but to have her beautiful sister beside him was, well—he called it "splendiferous!" He gave the pony its head and away they sped, down leafy lanes and round corners, at a capital pace. "How is it I have never met you before, miss?" he began with ingratiating friendliness. "I know all your family pretty well now, since I came back from college, that is to say. But I have never had the luck to meet you till to-day."

"I have been in France," was the brief rejoinder that fell coldly from his companion's lips.

"Oh, at school, I suppose? And I have been at Cambridge, you know. That is why it was," said Darke.

Rachel's lip curled.

"Bragging of being at college," she thought, scorn-

fully to herself. "Who is he, I wonder! He is not a *gentleman*."

"Ah, there is home!" she presently exclaimed, as a square, ivy-clad house, with steps rising directly from the road, came in sight. "It looks just the same!" she added, under her breath.

Darke laughed, and asked facetiously :

"Why, you would not have expected it to have grown much, would you? Though, with such a large family as your father owns, a little extra room might not come amiss. I say—how chock-full of science he is! A wonderful man, with all his discoveries. I go round to see him in the laboratory pretty often. He and I are great friends."

Dickie was slightly exaggerating the friendship, with an eye to better future acquaintance with this beautiful, silent girl. But he had good taste enough not to accept Marion's hesitating invitation to come in with them. So he drove off with a "Bye-bye" to Marion, betokening acquaintance with Society slang, but a look of admiration at Rachel, and a warm grasp given by his thick-set hand, that even in her weariness she noticed, and slightly shrank from.

CHAPTER IX.

"RACHEL, I believe Mr. Darke is quite smitten with you."

Marion had only time to murmur this with an abnegating smile, when the front door burst open and a crowd of children rushed out. Two little girls of seven and ten almost tumbled down the steps in their eagerness to hug Rachel; four short chubby arms were flung round her neck at the same time.

"That's it, choke her well, worry her, while you are about it!" cheered two bigger schoolboys who were pressing round the group, not condescending to such infantile demonstrations, though bursting with curiosity and impatience.

"Where is father?" went on Rachel, eagerly.

"Making stinks. He is in the laboratory as usual; he is brewing a witches' cauldron."

“Not a bit of it, you rogues ; here he is himself. Welcome back, my darling,” came in a man’s voice from within doors.

Then appeared a singular, but withal pleasing individual. He was in his shirt-sleeves, and wore a large apron with villainous looking stains. His hair was suffered to grow almost upon his shoulders. One could see it had once waved silkily brown as Rachel’s own, though now it was grizzling. He was growing bald about the temples, but his wide brow was finely shaped ; his refined features firmly cut, and the kindness beaming in his grey eyes counter-balanced the determination of the thin and delicate lips. A remarkable face, benign, sensitive ; one that could either win a stranger by its expression as of a man whose heart was brimming with the milk of human kindness, or light up with fire and wrath in the smallest just cause, even in the protection of a worm which the thoughtless gardener’s spade would have cut in two. Such was Hilary Wayland !

“Dear, dearest daddie !”

And Rachel threw herself into his arms and hugged him as closely as the little girls had hugged herself.

“My pet lamb! Our shipwrecked one, who has been in peril of great waters!” uttered Wayland, while the strong man’s voice trembled. And he kissed his daughter solemnly in his great gladness. Taking her face gently between his hands, Wayland blessed her in a low voice thrilling with affection. Next, looking round at the little family group on which a hush of attention had fallen, he said impressively :

“This is the girl—the young girl who preferred staying to the last on board a sinking ship, rather than deprive any other fellow-being of a chance of life. She is my child, and I am proud to be her father.” Then his face grew stern, his nostrils dilated, and fire lit his eye. “But what shall we all say of the man, the dastard, my own brother, and uncle to you all, who himself got into a boat leaving a young creature like this, a woman, to perish? From this moment he is no brother of mine. Children! remember if ever you are asked henceforth is Sir Horace Wayland your uncle, or any relation of our family, say *no!*”

“We will, father!” chorused all the childish

trebles, the schoolboys in their enthusiasm ready to cheer.

"Oh, don't say so, daddie," implored Rachel, with rising tears. "Indeed, I am sure he never meant—he did not think—that was all."

"Men *should* think ; men ought to keep their heads in a crisis," returned Hilary. But then changing his tone of severity suddenly to a charming playfulness: "There, there! Our dove must not distress herself once she has flown back to this old ark of ours. Why," holding Rachel away to take an affectionately critical inspection, "why, she has grown, I verily believe, during her illness, eh, Marion? How could we ever have thought it possible to part with her, eh, Marion?"

"That is like the Arab sheik's address to the steed he had meant to sell," replied Marion, smiling.

"Yes, yes," chimed in the children; "we can repeat it:

"My beautiful, my beautiful, that standest meekly by,
With thy glossy neck and——"

"There, that will do," interrupted Rachel, laughing. "How are the experiments going, father?"

"Bless my soul! you may well ask. I have come away now in the very middle of a most important one that has taken me days of thought," smiled Wayland, ruefully, with an uneasy backward glance. "Nothing less than seeing you, my pet, would have tempted me at this moment out of my den; not a visit from her Majesty; not five hundred pounds!"

"Then hurry, hurry! Back to your den and your stinks!" urged Rachel, pushing him before her by the shoulders. "Why, we may all be blown up sky-high if you delay!"

The home of the Waylands was a picturesque Queen Anne house, when seen from the road close upon which it stood, with its red brick walls peeping through their thick mantle of ivy and creepers; but indoors it was a wofully different sight. Poor Marion did her valiant best against "Decay's effacing fingers," and the ravages of eight children that had succeeded herself. But for years it had needed fresh paper and paint, window-sashes and carpets,

and a host of smaller adornments. Its wants struck both sisters now keenly as they entered the faded sitting-room, when Rachel pulled off her hat to cool her brows.

The door opened just then, and in came a tall, comely woman of about thirty, in a nurse's dress. It was a pleasure to look at her smiling, purposeful face, and abundant auburn hair gathered under a little snowy cap, while her large, somewhat coquettish apron and neat black gown made both sisters feel that Nurse Gibson was always tastefully dressed. By contrast they now felt dusty, shabby, and old-fashioned.

"Welcome back, Miss Rachel. It is a pleasure to see you again," said the nurse, with unfeigned gladness in her expression. "How are you, Miss Wayland? I have come to tell you that Mrs. Wayland says she knows Miss Rachel has come back and wants to see her immediately. She is rather excited."

"How was it you could not keep it from her, nurse?" asked Marion, with slight reproach in her mind, though none in her voice. "What a pity she

knows! Miss Rachel might have rested herself first."

"Yes, indeed; but how she guessed it is simply extraordinary," said the nurse truthfully, with sincere regret. "I only broke it to her, Miss Rachel, that you were coming back after a visit, but she seemed to guess some way that you had been ill or in trouble, and that we were keeping it back from her. Really it makes one believe that she knows more than one would think through some sixth sense."

"I will go at once."

And up got Rachel, though with dizzy head and weary limbs.

Her mother was in a bedroom upstairs, propped with pillows in a reclining chair, and watched the door with feeble eagerness. She had been a pretty woman, and her delicate features seemed now still more refined by illness. But there was a troubled look in the invalid's eyes, and a puckering of her forehead, which told that her mental faculties had been somewhat numbed, as well as her bodily ones, by the insidious advances of paralysis.

"Ah, Rachel, you have come back. Glad, my

dear, very glad," faltered the sick mother, beginning to cry a little, weakly like a child.

Rachel bent down and kissed her, stroked her hair, patted her hands with cheering reassurance.

"Yes. Here I am, of course; back from a little visit to Uncle Horace, you know. Why, you knew I was coming back, mother darling!"

"Somehow I thought you had gone on the sea?" queried the invalid, with a puzzled air.

The three spectators glanced guiltily at each other, feeling this was quite uncanny. How could she know? Rachel's voyage had been carefully kept a secret from her.

"I felt as if you were in some trouble, dear—that something was wrong with you," went on Mrs. Wayland, with vague feebleness.

"Well, you see I am all right. How nice you look, mother! And your room is so bright with the setting sun. How is the canary? And, oh, what lovely tea-roses!"

"Yes; Rachel is all right. But she is tired, mother dear, and ought to rest," interposed Marion, briskly.

Mrs. Wayland was still looking in her younger daughter's face, as if unable to take away her yearning eyesight from Rachel's features, while she kept holding the latter's arm with a nerveless, yet detaining touch. She had not once looked at Marion, or addressed her.

"Yes—yes. Nurse will look after her. Take great care of her, nurse."

The anxious solicitude in the mother's voice showed that her affections were not deadened towards her favourite child.

Nurse Gibson, nothing loth, humoured her patient and led off Rachel captive.

"Now I will take you in hand, my dear," she exclaimed, when out of earshot, with an air of professional pride.

Rachel gratefully gave herself up hereupon to Gibson's capable hands, who promptly undressed her and tucked her into bed, despite protests.

Rachel felt very strange lying there and looking around the well-known room to which she had so lately bidden, as she thought, a long farewell. It was a south room, overlooking the garden behind

the house, and would have been very pleasant had it not been so shabby. The boys had occupied it last winter during their holidays, and had amused themselves by pasting a collection of coloured pictures over the wall at one end with gruesome result. Almost unconsciously Rachel turned her head towards the other wall where the faded paper did not worry her by incongruity.

Then Gibson went off for some tea and invalid toast, and when she came back had a little gossip with Rachel, of whom she was sincerely fond.

When Marion presently came in, full of affectionate zeal for the sister she inwardly idolised, she felt rather "out of it," as the boys would say. Her mother had returned peevish answers to all attempts at pleasing her, having only thought for Rachel, and now nurse Gibson monopolised her.

"So Mr. Darke drove you both home, young ladies. I saw you out of the passage window," ended Nurse Gibson, rising reluctantly, but feeling that duty, which she never shirked, drew her back to Mrs. Wayland.

"Yes," said Marion, laughingly ; "I believe he has taken quite a fancy to Miss Rachel."

"I cannot say I return it, then," retorted Rachel.

Both girls felt that Nurse Gibson was so superior to the servants, and such a real friend in the household, that they might jest a little with her now and then.

As Marion went out of the room for a minute, Nurse Gibson confidentially agreed with Rachel.

"Mr. Darke is not worth much, miss, you are quite right. But, you see, Miss Wayland rather likes him."

CHAPTER X.

DAYS and nights had sped away, one much like another for the inmates of the Red House. At last came a cold November morning when Rachel came downstairs hungry and rubbing her chill hands.

Marion was presiding at the breakfast table, although she had been called up twice in the night to help Nurse Gibson in one of Mrs. Wayland's attacks.

"Will you have porridge, Bonnie, or will you have a pear?" shouted Freddie and Bobbie. "Pears and porridge, that is all there is to eat."

"I am so sorry, dear," apologised Marion, with a troubled face; "but there has been some mistake about the baker this morning, and he has not left us any bread. All there was in the house had to go upstairs to mother's room—besides some I have kept for father."

“The baker has not been paid for ages! I heard his boy say so,” announced Bobbie between huge spoonfuls of porridge; “and the boy has got orders to leave no more on tick. My eye! if the other tradesmen do the same we shall starve, eh, sis-sie?”

“*Will* you be quick with your breakfast, instead of talking about what does not concern you!” demanded Marion, with quiet exasperation.

“Poor old girl,” said Freddie, condescendingly; “she does get so wild because daddie won’t give her any housekeeping money. And he has spent five hundred over this new electric invention of his. It is to be a primary battery that will beat all old steam-engines into fits, and daddie says he will spend seven hundred or fifteen hundred pounds before he has done with it!”

“Boys, *do* hold your tongues and be off to school!” interrupted Rachel, noticing with pity a dull, troubled flush rising in Marion’s tired face.

Wonderful to say, the boys obeyed her. They rather enjoyed rebelling against and baiting their staid elder sister; but when Rachel, their good com-

rade, rapped their knuckles sharply, so to speak, conscience told them they had transgressed too far.

When the children left reluctantly, the two elder girls looked each other sympathisingly in the face.

"Is it true?" murmured Rachel.

"Yes," sighed Marion; "the old, old story."

"But where does father get the money from for these experiments? His half-yearly dividends, and what rents there are, only come in before Christmas, now that one thinks of it! Why, he is generally at the lowest ebb about this time of the year, but he has been paying—actually *paying*—for that new machinery set up just now, and knocking down the laboratory wall next the washhouse to make room for the number of his cells. I remember standing by and hearing the mason ask to get his money beforehand; he said he was a poor man, and could not wait for his wages. And daddie gave him five pounds, and only asked him to hurry the job."

"Five! far too much," groaned Marion. "But as to *where* the money comes from, can't you guess?"

"What! Not Mr. Darke!" and Rachel started,

while an angry light came into her grey eyes, and she drew her velvety white forehead into an unusual frown.

It was rare indeed for Rachel to look wrathful, but now the resemblance to her father in one of his swift moods of anger was striking.

"Yes; Richard Darke," replied Marion, calmly. "He does not talk about expecting to see father a millionaire, and going shares with him, without a meaning. Of course, dear daddie believes he is going to coin gold, mountains high, for us all.

"But Dickie Darke is far too much his father's son to be led away by such a flattering dream," burst in Rachel. "Why, I have heard from the cottagers of old Darke, the corn miller, who used to play usurer in the country, and when the poor farmers were behind-hand with their rent and would bring him up corn the day before or so to sell, he would pretend he did not want it unless they gave it at so much a sack under market price. *What does he do it for?*"

"Can you ask?" returned Marion, significantly; "I should think he comes here often enough to make

even *you* see that. And, poor fellow, after all, he cannot help what his father may have been."

"He comes not only often enough, but far too often," returned Rachel, hotly, a wave of disgust passing over her. "I hate his new music from town that he brings me, and I almost hate his hot-house flowers from that brand-new horror of a house with its big cathedral windows and little pepper-box towers at the four corners, and I would almost hate his grapes, only that mother enjoys them."

"Do not speak so harshly ; remember he is desperately in love with you, and if he should come soon to try and get a chance of telling you so, I only hope you will not be hasty or too proud towards him."

"Marion!" gasped Rachel, wide-eyed ; "why, he has made you his ally. How can you?"

"How can I? Well, dear, I can because I really care for you—there!"

The speaker's voice trembled.

It was true. Marion dearly loved Rachel, and all the anxiety of a mother and the love of romance of a young woman filled her mind for her sister. Rachel

was their family beauty ; not clever, but devotedly affectionate and dutiful, even submissive, by nature. She seemed exactly fitted for matrimony, and she was not strong enough at present for work. Besides, were many men likely to come as wooers to the wayside Red House, what between the Wayland poverty and Hilary Wayland's pride of birth and their mother's illness ? Oh, she dreaded to see her bright young sister withering slowly away through monotonous years ; without sufficient or congenial occupation ; with no hopes of a larger life, or easier circumstances, in her middle age.

Then a rich married sister could do so much for the boys ; for Connie and Ethel. Even Will the middy, and Horace, preparing at Cambridge for the Church, would benefit by a second home to come back to, with comforts and amusements they most sadly missed at present.

"It is all very well to talk, but you would not do it yourself," declared Rachel, passionately.

"You need not speak of my ever marrying," was all Marion meekly returned, as she stared at the fire.

Truly she did not advocate Dickie Darke's cause

for her own advantage, and Rachel knew it and repented.

The door opened, and Wayland himself came in with a sort of quiet haste.

"Breakfast, breakfast, please, my dears," he ejaculated, kissing both daughters absently, though fondly.

Then he began breaking the bread saved for him, and eating it in dry pieces.

"Wait, daddie, you want butter. Let me spread it for you. I must feed you myself," cried Rachel, rebukingly, while Marion began pouring out her father some hot cocoa. "Now, do not forget your egg when you have half eaten it, as you did yesterday. And have you been naughty again, and sat up all night?"

"Not quite all night, my dear, but until five this morning," owned Wayland, deprecatingly, passing his hand a little wearily over his broad brow; but then, looking up with one of his rarely sweet smiles at his daughter, "Ah, dear me! one little thing—the one connecting link—that still eludes me. 'For want of a nail the shoe was lost.' I may have to

pull all my work to pieces and begin over again ; but"—bringing his hand down upon the table—"I will not be beaten ! I will spend my last penny ! I will work the nails off my fingers ! I will drop on the floor with fatigue before I give in ! I feel on the right track ! Do you understand that I am busy inventing a primary battery containing a re-agent, which, when placed in a galvanic cell, is to furnish not alone electric light, but motive power. Why, I tell you it will work a greater revolution in science, in commerce, affecting all classes of mankind, than this half-century has yet seen."

His pale, finely-cut features were alight with enthusiasm, his voice vibrated, and he gazed far away as if seeing into the future.

"What baffled me last night," he murmured, "is a trouble due to polarisation in the cells. But when my battery is once made on a commercial scale, that will not be the case. It will come right."

His daughters looked at him and at each other.

* * * * *

Two evenings later, Richard Darke was standing

on the hearth-rug in the Red House drawing-room, looking hard at Rachel. The latter was sitting with her hands lying resignedly in her lap, and a troubled frown, that took the shape of a small horse-shoe, puckering her forehead.

The young man had been stammeringly, but ardently, pleading his cause.

“I did hope—perhaps I should not, but I did—that you had begun to like me a little better. What is there about me that you dislike? Would you mind telling me?”

Slowly, unwillingly, Rachel raised her candid grey eyes and looked at him with vague criticism. What was it? The young fellow did not look amiss after a fashion. In her opinion he had too round a head and too fat a face. But certainly his face was alive enough now with ardour, with devotion towards herself, while his eyes were absolutely distended with the humility of his beseeching. Nothing was there to grumble at as to his height and appearance, except that his clothes were a trifle too fashionable to please her fastidious taste.

She remained silent.

"Cannot you give me some hope? You might change," urged Darke; and the young man's voice really trembled with emotion.

"I do not know. I do not think I should ever really care for you very much, if that is what you want me to say," honestly murmured poor Rachel, feeling hard-pressed.

"Is there—has there—been any other fellow before me?" persisted Darke, the veins in his forehead beginning to swell.

"Yes."

"You are engaged, then?" Darke was almost choking, but he struggled hard to control his fury and bitterness. "I must say, you might have given me a hint." Even then his devotion to Rachel was too slavish to allow him to do more than mutter reproachfully against his idol. But immediately, with a sort of joyous outburst, as if finding some one upon whom he could wreak his vengeance, he continued: "It is your sister who has taken me in. By Heaven! she has fooled me; encouraged me!"

"No, no. Be silent. She does not know; at least, not much. She says I ought to consider my-

self free ; but I cannot, I——” and, cruelly agitated, Rachel sprang up and went towards the window.

“Miss Rachel,” began the young man, in gentle pleading, “be frank with me, as I am with you. Who is the fellow ? Tell me all about it.”

“I cannot. He was on board the *Oceana* during the shipwreck ; he— Oh ! he may never come back to find me, though he asked me to marry him when the voyage was over. Why, he does not even know my real name.”

Poor Rachel still stared out into the twilight and laughed hysterically.

“Not know your real name ?” repeated Darke, coming with gentle footfall slowly up behind her “Why, how could that be ?”

“They called me Miss Smith, Uncle Horace and Lady Wayland did, because I was merely her companion, and she did not wish people to know I was their niece. Only that is a secret ; even father does not know. It was rather unkind of them ; but, there—please never say a word about it !”

Dickie Darke’s lips formed into a prolonged silent whistle. Could Rachel have looked round, the ex-

FOR THE SAKE OF THE FAMILY.

expression on his face would have startled her. The sudden memory of an advertisement he had read in the "Lancet" column of the *Times*, repeatedly inserted, had flashed across his rejected mind. It ran as follows:

It is well known that the most common cause of the disease of the lungs is the want of exercise and fresh air. It is therefore recommended that the patient should go to the sea, or to the mountains, or to the country, and breathe the pure air of the open sky.

It is also recommended that the patient should take a course of treatment at the sea, or at the mountains, or at the country, and breathe the pure air of the open sky.

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Rachel averted her head from Darke's burning eyes. For full five minutes there was silence in the twilight. Then came the slow answer :

“ If he does not come for me, or find me in a year, from the time I last saw him, I—I will do as you wish.”

CHAPTER XI.

AFTER her provisional engagement to Richard Darke, Rachel began to grow restless at home.

"I am perfectly well, so why should I not be working?" she kept repeating to Marion, and thereupon tried her utmost to obtain a place as governess in a family or school. But alas! the market was overstocked, and poor Bonnie's proficiency was rather under than equal to that of her rival competitors. Till Easter came she knew the sickness of hope deferred, while Dickie laughed in his heart, but was outwardly slavishly devoted.

Then when the Lent lilies were blowing in the bare hedgerows, when lambs were bleating and young rooks crying in their nests, she left England's shores for an engagement of a few months on the Continent. It was to travel as companion to two rich

but somewhat ailing old ladies going through a course of German waters. Of her life with them it is sufficient to say that it was monotonous enough but not unpleasant.

"It will be better than staying at home, at all events," she confided to Nurse Gibson before her departure, as the latter kindly and energetic woman was upon her knees, packing Rachel's trunk, despite remonstrances.

Gibson looked up at her with a shrewd, pitying smile.

"Miss Rachel, you remind me of a child that knows that it has got to take some medicine very soon, but turns away its head not to see the draught beforehand."

"Medicine is wholesome, at all events," returned Rachel, feeling awkward. "I believe you are glad to get rid of me: you have been urging me so much to go."

"I glad to lose you! Why, miss, when you are gone who will there be left for me to speak to in the house?" returned Nurse Gibson, with a look of sincere liking on her comely face, and some reproach

in the big greenish-grey eyes turned upon her young lady. "I do not care about mixing much with the servants, and Miss Wayland is too busy to have any minutes to spare for me. Then I am very fond of your dear mother, but still, she is so much of an invalid; and Miss Connie and Miss Ethel are only children. No, I shall miss you very greatly, and only want you to go for your own good. Who knows? Mr. Right may meet you at some of these hotels abroad."

"Ah! Mr. Right will not be in Germany, I am afraid," returned Rachel, leaving the room with a laugh and a sigh.

It was only natural that Rachel should treat Nurse Gibson a little familiarly, feeling soothed by that pleasant, capable woman's sympathy. Marion made the mistake of being too wholly partial to Dickie. At times Rachel felt as if she would like him better if some one disparaged him a little, and did not always defend him against her just criticism.

"Why should Marion thrust it down my throat that he is never to blame for his little failings—that

he is good-hearted enough to make up for calling ham *tasty*, and licking the gravy off his thumb when his fork was splashed at dinner yesterday?"

This was all woman's crankiness. Rachel would not have liked Dickie one bit better had Marion shuddered like herself in delicate disgust. But Nurse Gibson, seeing what was required, with womanly intuition was quite ready to dance when piped to, and weep when Rachel mourned. Most folks she let go their own way in life, going her own faithfully, as she said, with firm step and high head, taking a pride in her duties as nurse. But, after living nearly two years with the Waylands she was attached to Rachel, and the latter would often gratefully exclaim :

"What on earth should we ever do without you nurse? I do not so much mind going when I feel that you will be Miss Marion's right hand."

It was indeed a comfort, as Marion likewise felt, though she less often acknowledged, to have such an excellent woman in the house, who was like a friend of the family.

Six months was the term which Rachel had im-

pulsively told Dickie she would wait before accepting him. How fast those months had fled !

On the very day before the time expired (Rachel knew the date well, for Darke had often reminded her of it), she alighted early at the St. Ermins railway-station, and, leaving her trunk to be brought by the omnibus, began to walk homewards. It was a warm morning in early July, and the dust was thick on the roadway: poppies were spread aflame through the fields beyond the hedgerows. Rachel had not written to say she was returning home, lest Richard Darke might hear of it and come to meet her. It seemed almost a guilty action thus to sneak back to the Red House without a word of warning. No one was on its steps as she turned the bend of the road; no one looking out of the windows that blinked cheerily from out their green ivy setting.

She opened the door, which stood confidently unlocked, and quietly walked into the shady, faded drawing-room, giving Marion a great start, who was sitting there over her household accounts.

“Do not be vexed,” cried Rachel, excusing herself

with kisses. "My old ladies were so erratic in their plans, dear; and what between one thing and another, I thought you would not mind my surprising you?"

"No, no; only——" and Marion put on her housekeeper's frown; "only that Eddie has come home, dear, and he is in your old room. He must sleep with the boys to night, that is all."

"Ah, Eddie!" and pleasure struggled with expectant anxiety in Rachel's face. For this brother was the ne'er-do-well of the family, and was always returning to the home nest after either losing, or, as he called it, "giving up" situations which were not suited to his lively temperament. "And what is he doing with himself here?"

"Spending most of his time with Richard. They have become great friends: too much so, I almost think, in some ways. Dickie does not care to come so much for father's scientific experiments now, for Eddie is so fond of cricket, and loafing about the town; and he persuades Richard to go with him."

"Ah!"

Rachel scented some trouble, but was not greatly

surprised. Good-hearted boy though Eddie was, he could not keep out of mischief.

"But, Bonnie, father has found a new friend—Lord St. Ermins," cried both the little girls, who had been studying their lessons in a corner of the room. "He comes often here, but not when Dickie is engaged to supper, for they do not get on together. They have some quarrel about the fish in the river."

"Lord St. Ermins," repeated Rachel, puzzled. "Is he that old grey-beard who used to come sometimes to see his property, cut the first sod of a railway, or open a school?"

"No, no, no. This is the new lord," explained Ethel, frisking about, and holding her head high with an important air. "He has grey hair; but he is very nice, and father and he are great friends. He quite spoils me, and Connie too. We go to have tea with him at the Wilderness."

"This man came into the title last Christmas," added Marion. "There is a London house, you know, where the old lord always lived; but this one says he likes St. Ermins, and after coming down to

look around, finds a good deal to do for his tenantry. So he is living at the old house, down in the valley, that the agent always used to have. It is very weedy and overgrown, and the house wanted repairs badly, but he is settling it up."

Rachel knew the Wilderness well, and many a time had said she would like to live there. It was a low, rambling old house, so covered with wisteria and roses, that it was like a flowery nest.

She asked what the new neighbour did, not taking any great interest in the newcomer's doings herself, but seeing that he was the main topic of conversation for the present in the Red House.

"They say he is not a rich man, though he has come into the title," Marion volubly responded, with an involuntarily brightening face. "But he takes the well-being of the poor very much to heart; so he has begun to work the bleach mills a good deal more, and father is going to help him with new machinery. It has quite given an impetus to the trade of the town. Unfortunately, however, Richard has taken a great dislike to him, and declares that the fish in the stream are being poisoned. He says, though

the trade has increased, so has the damage, and he is even getting up an injunction among the neighbours to restrain Lord St. Ermins from injuring the trout. Father is quite vexed about it, and says if only Richard will have patience he may be able to hit off some other mode of bleaching which may suit both parties. And Dickie replies—fairly, I think—that meanwhile the fishing will be ruined. One does not know which side to take.”

Just then, beyond the drawn blinds, came the sound of laughing, somewhat riotous voices in the garden.

“That is Dickie! there is Eddie!” cried the little girls.

At the same moment Rachel snatched up her hat and gloves and slipped out of the room.

“I cannot see him to-day—I won’t,” she whispered to Marion, shaking her head vigorously and escaping upstairs.

A minute later Dickie Darke was suddenly hushed as the children announced that Bonnie had come home. In two seconds he was on his good behaviour, and looked quite pious, as Eddie laughingly told him.

Marion was too busy to look much at either of the young men, or she might have noticed that their faces were more flushed than even the August sun could answer for, and that Dickie's speech was somewhat thick as he entrusted her with a humbly affectionate message for her sister before he went away.

She even said afterwards to Eddie, with innocent sympathy :

"Dickie seemed quite overcome, did he not?"

"Yes," grinned Eddie. (Then, in a mental aside, "It was that last drink that did it.")

CHAPTER XII.

LATER on the children came and helped Rachel to unpack her trunk, hoping for stray small gifts. They related stories of their dear Lord St. Ermins, and of how they had told him their sister Bonnie was coming back.

"Do you know," chattered Miss Connie, while testing the springiness of Rachel's bed by a series of jumps up and down upon it, "do you know this, that I am his little sweetheart? He says I have eyes just like some lady he knew. Then"—collapsing into a sitting posture and a tone of serious confidence with surprising quickness—"then I ask-*ked* him—Ethel, you oughtn't to say *ast*—I ask-*ked* him where was the lady. And he sayed, 'Ah! that I can't tell you, little Brighteyes;' and he looked awful melyncholly. So I said, 'Never mind; if she's gone away, I'll pat your cheeks.' For

when daddie is sorry 'bout his stinks not fizzing up nicely, I allus pat his cheeks——”

“Connie, you didn’t?” exclaimed Rachel, laughing.

“I did. And he said, ‘Then will you be my little sweetheart?’” responded Connie, scrambling up to begin more joyous jumps. “An’ he said might he kiss my hand. Only the boys laughed and said that I sold my kisses for sixpence to Mr. Darke. So I sayed, ‘Oh, the price has gone up, and they’re a shilling each now to *him*,’ but Lord St. Ermins might have a whole twelve for a penny, because he’s so nice; or else, if he liked, he might pull my nose for threepence——”

“Constance, I am shocked!” protested her elder sister, in a virtuously-severe tone, spoilt by the mirth brimming over in her eyes.

“Yes; but he only purtends to pull my nose, and gives me all his silver threepennies. Mr. Darke did give me sixpence, but he pinched my nose red, so I’ll not let him do it any more.”

Nurse Gibson, too, came with welcome on her tongue, but a deprecating, troubled expression in her eyes.

"No, there has not been much change with us," so she answered Rachel's inquiries. "Of course, you could hardly expect to find your poor mother better, could you, my dear? She cannot walk downstairs now, and hardly into the next room on my arm; and she sleeps a good deal more. Well, as they say, what must be, must be."

Rachel's meeting with her father was as affectionate as ever; but he was even more absent-minded than usual when talking upon anything but the latest development of the famous battery.

That evening, about four o'clock, as Rachel once more sat in the drawing-room over a cup of tea, the door-bell rang. One of the boys, slipping out as a scout to take a peep, announced Lord St. Ermins was on the doorstep.

For the second time Rachel sprang up and whispered that she would run away. Having refused to meet Richard, she felt it was impossible to see the new neighbour; and perhaps had heard too much of his many excellences not to be a little prejudiced against him—as is the way with our poor human nature.

A vague sense of disappointment at her welcome home stole over our heroine's mind that evening fight against it as she would. Marion had been occupied all the afternoon arranging another room for Eddie with her own hands; for, as ill-luck would have it, the housemaid had gone away ill, and Eddie had so fascinatingly entreated his elder sister to give him a room to himself, that he might not be kept awake all night by those young cubs, Freddie and Bobbie, bolstering him, that she had done her best with a spare dressing-room. It was Rachel's own fault for not giving notice of her return; but Marion would not tell her that, lest it should vex her.

And so our poor Rachel only felt that somehow her return was a mistake; and that the new neighbour, Lord St. Ermins was a personage of greater importance in the fickle minds of her young sisters (and also, it seemed, one of more real help and interest to her father at the present crisis of the making of the battery) than herself.

Upstairs that night Rachel went wearily to bed, but felt too unhappy and oppressed with a sense of coming trouble to go to sleep. She heard at last the

church clock strike three as she lay with staring eyes, listening in the darkness. Then she got up with feverish impulse and slipped into her dressing-gown, pushed the window open, and crouched down on the floor with her arms on the window-sill.

The garden below her was dreamy in a faint moonlight. Beyond it she could just descry the wide water meadow through which the little river crept, and further still the woods that were the boundary of Richard Darke's property. To-morrow morning she would have the right to look upon those woods of ill-grown, unthinned trees, stretching upwards for the light and air of which they deprived each other, as her own in future. And the hideous house beyond on the hill-rise, a bungalow with Gothic windows and peel towers at its four corners—that would be her home in the years to come.

This young girl's feelings towards Richard Darke himself this night were more those of resignation, of self-chiding for being so ready to find fault with the young man, than of any active dislike.

“If he were only not so cringingly anxious to please me,” she thought to herself with a sigh. “If

he had only chosen Marion instead, who really likes and appreciates him, I do believe. If only he had not lent father all this money, which the dear old daddie thinks he can repay as soon as his invention is perfected; but that we know will hang like a millstone about his neck for ever and ever unless I sacrifice myself. Well, well!" A favourite rhyme of her schoolboy brothers came to her recollection, even as with dazed, sleep-longing eyes she looked out into the night :

"If ifs and ans were pots and pans,
'Twould cure the tinker's cares;
If ladies did not carry fans,
They'd give themselves no airs."

Rachel tried to laugh in her sore mind at herself. After all, she was making what people would call a good match for a penniless girl and one of a large family. But a sudden gush of tears came instead of mirth, and she hid her face on her bare arms and sobbed silently till she was worn out. As at last she lifted her tear-stained face with a resolve to go to bed and fight no more against the decrees of Fate, a something stirring in the twilight garden below

suddenly arrested her attention. Surely somebody was moving down by the sweet-pea hedge. Yes ; a dark, ghostly figure was flitting along the gravel-path, keeping in the shadow of the shrubs ; darting guiltily across some more open patches of ground ; now it was close up under the house. Rachel held her breath. " Who—what can it be ? Could it be a burglar ? " She thought of what little plate they still possessed ; it was always left downstairs in the dining-room : the children's silver christening mugs ; the cups Eddie had won as champion runner and swimmer at his school—his only prizes.

She craned her head cautiously out, past the trails of roses and ivy, and now could just discern the figure by the study window, which was only a foot-and a half above the ground.

The study was a most unstudious room, nowadays abandoned to the boys in general. No doubt the window had been left unbolted, for no one dreamt of danger at night in that quiet neighbourhood ; and yet Rachel recalled to mind some instances of ricks fired by tramps, hen-roosts visited by gipsies, and so forth.

The servants' stairs led clear down to the study-door from near Rachel's bedroom; and down these stairs Rachel crept a little way in the darkness, listening; ready to turn and flee up again to safety her ears the while being strained.

With beating pulses she heard the window softly open; a minute later the door-handle was turned by cautious fingers. Swiftly and bravely Rachel resolved to wait until the burglar was in the dining-room, then to slip downstairs herself and lock the door, escape from its window looking upon the road being impossible, owing to high iron railings. She would have him in a trap. Now he was in the little hall; then, listening intently, a faint creaking noise caught her ear. Perhaps he was uncertain of the dining-room door.

Some moments passed in the darkness without a sound giving the least warning of what was passing, when a light step on the corridor a little above the stair on which she crouched made Rachel's blood run cold. Despite her supposed courage, she felt sick for a moment, and had a queer tingling feeling about the roots of her hair. He could not see her in

the darkness ; but had she stood three yards behind up there, he would have stumbled full upon her.

The soft step turned straight down the wide passage leading to the best bedrooms, occupied by Mrs. Wayland and her nurse, and by Wayland himself. (But to night the latter was still in the laboratory as Rachel knew by the light she had seen shining through its garden window.) At the end of the passage was the dressing-room, hastily fitted up for Eddie. A door up there softly opened, then closed. Utter silence followed.

" It was Eddie ! "

A sudden sense of relief shot through Rachel, followed by disgust. Boys will be boys, of course ; still, she felt a womanly indignation against the poor lad, which she told herself was too severe, but that she could not help. With his mother lying near, so feeble, and not long for this world ; his father toiling down there in the garden laboratory in the cause of science ; and anxiety and care in both his sisters' minds, it was too bad of him to slink out thus—to that billiard-match in the town he had spoken of in the evening—when he was supposed to

be quietly asleep, and then creep in again like a thief, frightening her out of her wits.

Back to her own bed went Rachel, and stayed awake two hours, what with virtuous anger and having been so thoroughly roused. Only when the birds began to sing their *réveillé* she dropped to sleep at last, utterly tired out.

This was the day when Richard Darke was coming to claim her promise to be his affianced bride.

CHAPTER XIII.

It is a long time since we have heard of Randall Ingham. Let us visit him this very midnight, when Rachel, the girl he had loved and asked to be his wife, is lying tossing upon her bed, believing herself neglected, if not absolutely deserted by him. She has at last forced her reluctant mind to accept another lover to-morrow.

Randall is sitting alone this July night in a wide, old-fashioned room; dark oak rafters cross the low ceiling; the well-filled bookcases around and the beautiful carved mantelpiece are also of oak, genuinely dark through age. There are handsome old English chairs and tables furnishing the room, which look as if they had stood there in the self-same places nearly two hundred years—as is indeed the case.

It is plain enough to us as we take this glimpse in the fashion of clairvoyants, that our friend has

returned to Old England, and is living in a home where comfort and pleasant surroundings abound. He is perhaps a shade greyer as to his hair, and several degrees more thoughtful in expression, as he sits there looking dreamily at the windows that open to the ground, and are framed in roses hanging in sweet clusters dimly seen in the midsummer twilight.

With his head on his hand, he is thinking, as so many a night before, over the strange circumstances of six months ago. His last—indeed, his only—love-story comes back to him fresh in the smallest detail. Randall's first glimpse of his love on board ship ; then that happy, though stormy, week when they had tossed about in the Bay at the mercy of winds and waves, when every hour he had grown to love Rachel more and more, till there seemed to him but one person in the whole wide earth that filled his mind—whose lightest action and smallest word were fraught for him with deep significance. Then the accident to the *Oceana* ; his darling's pluck ; her sweet patience with the woman who repaid her services so unkindly ; and her heroic self-forgetful-

ness that night of the shipwreck. Once more he and she were drifting together in the open boat on a dark, stormy sea, while the men strained at the oars, hardly hoping ever to see land. Together they go down into valleys of dark waters and rise again on white crests of great waves, till little by little the storm abates and the sea goes down. Then morning breaks. He sees again the cold dawn in the East, while the clouds pack away, and they welcome day. Rachel's dear face, tired, but smiling, looks in his as the fishing-smack bears down to rescue them. Like a dream they two are travelling to Plymouth again. It was the foretaste of that honeymoon of which, alas ! he will never now taste the real bliss.

Then comes the station and the gaping crowd ; the hurried good-bye that both supposed to be but for a few hours. Afterwards—what a long blank !

Once more Ingham's impatient anger on board ship fired his blood on recalling it. But now he blamed the hurt indignation, the short-sighted pride, that had held him back from finding out more from the Waylands. Neither he nor Rachel would be beholden to them for happiness, he had said to himself ;

surely the next mail would bring her letter. But when the mail only brought his own love-missive returned from Plymouth, then Rachel seemed slipping from him ; while Sir Horace and her ladyship were gone up-country. Ingham next sent his urgent appeal in an advertisement to the *Times* ; wrote likewise instructions to his lawyers ; then hurried on his voyage. It was best to get this necessary duty over and to return to England all the sooner, he thought, little doubting he should find his love gladly awaiting him.

Meanwhile an unexpected surprise was in store. During his absence the sudden death of a young cousin made Randall heir to a grand-uncle, old Lord St. Ermins ; two months later the latter's death caused him to inherit the family title and estates immediately upon his return.

Strange, very strange, that Fate had led Ingham to the neighbourhood of the town of St. Ermins, where, in any case, he would have come to glean if possible, by the most searching inquiry, any news of his lost love. Still more strange that he had asked in vain for any news of Rachel Smith, instituting

his search discreetly and quietly, but, as he believed, thoroughly.

Discouraged, but not despairing, Randall still persevered. Luck had been dead against him through his boyhood and early manhood ; its weather-vane had somewhat veered to "fair" after his return home.

On starting for that last voyage, and meeting Rachel, the glad hope possessed him (that same hope which comes to every one of us at times in our lives) that *now*—now he was surely going to be happy !

Well, St. Ermins would not give up hope ; he would struggle manfully even yet. Firstly, he had gone the length of employing the services of some detectives since his return home. Lastly, putting pride aside, he had written to Lady Wayland in South Africa, explaining his engagement to her late companion, and how he had lost sight of the latter, with earnest entreaties that Lady Wayland would send him all the facts she was in possession of concerning Miss Smith's antecedents and friends, which might help him in his search. And now he waited and

watched each post anxiously. But still no answer came.

Rising, Randall went to the window, and, stepping out into the verandah, looked over the flowering terrace—a dim, fair vista of garden, closely embowered in trees. The place was well named *The Wilderness*, when he came to it, for nature had been given almost free play, within these boundaries. Only the weeds had been checked, and the fish-ponds kept clear; but the forest-trees had pushed great branches into the garden ground and yews were unclipped, and creepers trailing in tangled luxuriance. There was an undisturbed air about it as of a house that might have held the *Sleeping Beauty* herself.

“How Rachel would have loved it!” he sighed to himself.

Yes, a charming old house, a fair income, and the title of *St. Ermins*. How gladly would he have laid all these at his lost love’s feet.

“Rachel, Rachel, my darling! where are you? Can you not let me know? Come back to me!” he whispered soundlessly, as if the yearning in his heart might be conveyed to her even if far away. Might

not the sympathy between them make her feel his longing through the stillness and quiet of this night. He had before now heard of such intercommunion between mind's in affinity.

Then a dread thought stole like an icy whisper into his heart, often rejected before, but still creeping back :

“ Who knows ? She may be dead ! ”

CHAPTER XIV.

THE deed was done. With maidenhood's royal dignity Rachel had intimated her willingness to receive Richard Darke that morning at midday, when the children's lessons were finished and themselves safely despatched out of the way by Marion on a message to the little town of St. Ermins.

"Won't you—I thought you might have put on your better dress, dear," timidly suggested Marion, with a look of sisterly persuasion.

"No; he must take me as I am," decided our heroine, who felt herself that day of Vashti's haughty kin.

And Dickie did.

"There! It's over." was Rachel's announcement to her sister not very long afterwards, entering the "muddle" room. Marion, who was busily cutting

out furniture-covers, looked up from her knees with some pins between her lips, sad to say.

Her sisterly impulse was to jump and kiss Rachel; but the latter had thrown herself into the old cane rocking-chair, and was rocking herself so vigorously that sentiment seemed misplaced, as were the pins.

From the ivy-wreathed window Dickie was visible, taking his departure through the garden with an unusually subdued manner, and a look on his round, florid countenance of overawed bliss.

At the end of the garden Eddie popped out from behind the palisade of the paddock, which latter had been here converted into a rough and ready tennis-ground.

"Holloa, old chap! Let me be the first to congratulate you," he cried, wringing his friend's hand. For Dickie had long ago let the brother of his beloved into the secret of his attachment.

"Why, I declare, you look almost frightened."

"Phew! It is an awfully serious thing, dash it all," replied Dickie in a half whisper, looking conscious, hot and happy at the same time, yet gazing back at the windows of the Red House with an

apparent bashfulness that tickled Eddie amazingly, it was so like shame. "Your sister Rachel is glorious—but, you know, she says things so seriously, it makes a fellow think a lot. I am not half good enough for her! Half—no, not a quarter!" and tears fairly rose into Dickie's eyes; his hands shook as he nervously re-adjusted the gardenia in his coat; for he had "got himself up" for the occasion.

"I say, what a hang-dog look for a bridegroom! You have been lifting your elbow too often last night, old fellow," quoth Eddie, grinning. "Now look at me, I am as fresh as paint."

So he was. He looked the very counterpart of Rachel this morning, with his dark hair and handsome, smiling face.

"Ah," retorted Dickie, with a sort of groan, "it is very different for you." Then changing his tune, "Come back with me, dear boy, and we will drink the bride's health in fizz. Dry Monopole, a magnum apiece." And linked arm in arm, away they went through the meadow towards Dickie's ancestral halls.

Meanwhile Rachel, who had told her lover that she would herself break the news to her father, entered the latter's workshop. It was a high, white-washed room, mostly filled with the appliances for the electric battery. Hilary Wayland was, as usual during work hours, in his apron and shirt-sleeves. He was busy—but not too busy to listen when his favourite daughter spoke to him.

“Father, can you leave off work for a little while? I want to speak to you : it is about something serious, dear.”

His eyes gleamed tenderly upon her from under his broad, benignant brow ; the thin, mobile lips smiled sweetly.

“Certainly, my child, certainly,” and Wayland gave her a chair on one side of the bare deal-table, while he drew up another for himself, and sat down opposite her.

“It is about Mr. Darke, father, and—partly about myself. You like him, do you not? I—I mean you always used to like him last year, while he took so much interest in the battery.”

“Yes, dear?”

A troubled pucker was coming upon Hilary Wayland's forehead; his eyes looked more earnestly, a little apprehensively at his daughter.

"He has been very fond of me for a long time," brought out Rachel with a desperate effort; "he, in fact, before last Christmas, asked me to marry him; but I said I would wait and see—and—the end of it is, I have engaged myself to him this morning."

"Ah!"

It would be hard to say whether the ejaculation was a long-drawn sigh or a sound of surprise—perhaps relief. The news came with a certain shock upon the man; he was deeply attached to all his children, and doatingly fond of this girl, his chief treasure, the flower of his flock. For a moment a feeling of revolt against her choice, of disgusted grief that she should be "thrown away upon the fellow," rushed into Wayland's brain. But almost at the same instant came another rapid recollection, recalling his own liking for the good-humoured young fool who used to spend hours taking some genuine interest in Wayland's experiments; how he had often taken this disciple's part when Dickie was

under discussion; the lad's undoubted wealth—his own poverty. Both trains of thought ran through his mind at the same time, as it were, racing each other, and the last prevailed.

“Ha, ha!” he exclaimed, forcing a laugh, though feeling more inclined to weep. “So this was the meaning of all our interest in the primary battery, eh? Why, what a blind old idiot I was not to have guessed it.”

Then rising, he came round the table, and taking Rachel's head between his hands, kissed her forehead and blessed her with a heartfelt affection that brought tears into the poor girl's eyes.

Then sitting down once more, Wayland began very gently and kindly to give his daughter some parental warnings. He would not say much against Darke, whom he had, indeed—perhaps too carelessly—liked and admitted into the bosom of his family. But he did tell Rachel that of late, during her absence, rumours had reached him that the young fellow had been a trifle wild. Nothing serious, he trusted. Still, that Darke had been drifting into a second-rate set—a lot of idle chaps who played

billiards in the St. Ermins inn, and were too fond of betting and drinking.

Notably since Eddie had come home this had been the case; and Wayland's face darkened, for poor Eddie was the family scapegoat. The truth was—though Wayland did not know it—that it was Dickie who first introduced young Wayland to the set in question. After coming back from college, Dickie had held his head up and kept aloof; his courtship for Rachel had helped to keep him straight. But when she went away he drifted among these associates, where he was king of his company.

“Well, well, my child, your influence, I have no doubt, will steady him again. And I can trust you, my darling, not to marry any man whom you cannot honestly feel that you love.”

Rachel hung her head; she dared not utter the cry that was in her heart—

“It is for your sake, daddie.”

* * * * *

As Wayland put on his old tweed coat and soft felt-hat that afternoon, and betook himself down the wooded valley to be refreshed by the society of

his new friend, Lord St. Ermins, he frowned to himself, and occasionally sighed as he thought of Rachel's tidings. Again, at other moments the cloud lifted, for, with Dickie as his son-in-law, a certain heavy debt to the young man that at moments seemed like a huge boulder blocking the path of this enthusiast of Science became diminished in proportions.

Poor Wayland ! The most honest fanatic alive in the opinion of all who knew him well, he had always been convinced that his experiments would convert his slender fortune as a younger son into fabulous wealth for his dear ones, and to fame, dearest to his soul, for himself. But experiments, alas ! need money. Was he to blame, therefore, for borrowing from Darke, assuring the young fellow, with truthful conviction, that Dickie should be paid a hundred per cent. when the battery—the future wonder of its age—should be completed ?

He took off his hat and felt the afternoon breeze fan his brow pleasantly. The trout-stream, overhung with alder and hazel, beside which his path lay, then distracted his thoughts ; he kept looking out for fish, and noting with regret the discoloured water.

"I fear it is my fault for urging St. Ermins to try my better methods of bleaching," he mused ; "and yet the change has given such an impetus to the business ; it is such a fine thing for the town ; and for himself too, dear good fellow, for he is not rich enough for his title. I will ask him to come back with me to supper this evening. He is the best friend I have had for years ; *he is a man.*"

Wayland's soul was refreshed that afternoon by the rest and peace it found in the green leafy solitude of The Wilderness. But his friend was not to be persuaded back to supper.

On hearing of the engagement of Wayland's daughter, "Our Bonnie, as we call her," so the fond father described her, St. Ermins was sympathetic and full of good wishes. But, with a dry smile, he averred that the happiness of the bridegroom ought not to be clouded by meeting his opponent upon the question of the mill-stream, on the first evening that Darke was to be received into the Wayland family as one of themselves.

"Upon my word, I am such an ardent fisherman, that I almost feel as though the young fellow was in

the right. If I saw a dead trout, I should feel deadly ashamed of myself," he confided, between the whiffs of a good cigar, as they sat on the shady terrace and talked at their ease.

"You know your future son-in-law is getting up such an agitation amongst the neighbours against me, that you and I may expect an injunction to restrain me from using this new machinery. Then back we must go to the old jog-trot before we took it up. That means about a quarter of the bleaching done, and so many fewer hands employed; so much less money for the town and for myself. It seems a question of the good of man versus that of trout does it not?"

"Ha!" replied Wayland, as if a new thought had arisen in a certain portion of his brain where the germs of his inventions sprouted. A glimmering idea had come to him; it must be worked out. Not just yet, for the battery was all-important with its hopeful inventor just then—but some day. The latest method they had been using in the bleaching process need not be the last or best.

CHAPTER XV.

THREE days had passed since Rachel Wayland promised to be Darke's wife. Three days of wearing an iron collar, under which yoke it behoved her to look as proud and beaming as any slave of the ring can succeed in doing, even while it galled her at every turn.

"If only Dickie were not so horribly affectionate," she had sighed to herself on the first night, with her father's loving words of warning and encouragement still fresh in her ears. "As daddie says, I may be able to influence him to good through his love for me. Perhaps that is my mission in life; heigh-ho!"

Rachel knew that many women in life seek after a mission; try to build up one out of the materials that surround them, and call it doing good; which creation not unfrequently tumbles about their ears.

But her mission seemed thrust upon her; it was to advance the family prosperity, to save her father from debt without his knowing it, and to turn

Dickie Darke—the old miller's and usurer's son—into a respected and useful member of society.

“After all, he is not a bad young fellow.”

Those were daddie's words, and they well expressed the situation.

“If only he would be less demonstrative in his fondness, I do *not* think I should mind it so much,” she once more tried to reassure herself. “But perhaps I shall get better able to bear it.”

The second day Rachel's fretting deepened to disgust. As she sat with her accepted lover under the weeping ash-tree in the garden, the branches of which screened them both from view, Dickie *would* keep putting his arm round her waist, and it was hot weather, and Rachel told herself *that* was why she hated to feel his close presence. Then her left cheek and part of her ear were rasped by his moustache. It was a little moustache, widely parted in the middle, and growing high above his lip; “but surely no small bristle-brush from the oil-shop was ever much coarser,” reflected our ill-tempered maiden, who had practice in painting over the worn bedroom furniture with bright enamel, and

therefore considered herself something of a judge.

"Well, Duckie," began Dickie, ingratiatingly, for the tenth time, "I say, tell us" (here came a squeeze) "how soon will you become Mrs. Darke? Duckie and Dickie, they go well together, eh? Don't you think so? Come, I say! Say you think so."

"Please, don't be such an idiot! There, I beg your pardon, only——"

A snigger, with difficulty choked by a handkerchief into a fit of coughing, betrayed Eddie's presence on the other side of the green, pendulous ash-branches. After a last boisterous cough, the youth presented his handsome, smiling face—so like Rachel's own in its brilliant colouring and easy-going expression—through the parted screen.

"Excuse me, my dear turtle-doves, but I have been sent to tell you, by Marion, that Lord St. Ermins has come over to call. He is in the laboratory with the governor."

"Oh, d——!" muttered Dickie. Then, in apology to his *fiancée*, "Don't look so black, my girl; you must get used to a slip of the tongue now and then. you know!"

"I shall never get used to that," she quickly answered. "Men may swear when there is very strong cause, and no blame to them. But why use strong language against a friend of father's?"

"He is no friend of mine," retorted Darke, reddening with angry annoyance. "I must tell you all about it. He has not only cut me out with your father by getting him to help in improving some process in his blooming old bleach-mills, but he poisons all the trout in the very best trout-stream in the country; and as they say he is a good fisherman himself, all the more shame to him. Well, I won't go near his lordship, so you will stay with me, won't you, darling?"

"I am tired of doing nothing, so I will play tennis with you both," decided Rachel, almost sullenly.

His jokes wearied her. "Duckie and Dickie!" Why, the two schoolboys, and even seven-year-old Constance, were taking up these horrid catch-words.

The third day of Rachel's engagement had come, and she congratulated herself secretly that her lover had been away almost all day with Eddie at a pigeon

match near the town. It was a low sort of meeting, she had gathered from her brother, but that he and Dickie were "bosses of the show," so he did not think he, at all events, could well avoid going.

About four o'clock in the afternoon saw these two young worthies returning, flushed and a little excited in speech, as they came up the road to the Red House.

"Look here, Darke. I would not come in to-day if I were you, old fellow," urged Eddie. "Just let us dodge through the yard, and you can go quietly home by the short cut through the meadow, without any of the girls seeing you."

"What d'ye mean? I am going to see Rachel, I am. What right have you to stop me? Call yourself a friend!"

Dickie was speaking thickly. Again Eddie, who was holding his friend by the arm, somewhat anxiously tried to coax and persuade him. Dickie still rebelled.

Just then, who should come down the road a few yards off but Rachel herself, with a languid step and a careless eye as she saw the pair.

"Ah, there you are! . . . I was going in to see you. Here's Eddie interfering; he said you were out or busy," began Dickie, in an injured, angry tone.

Eddie interrupted.

"I only thought we would go up to The Towers and finish our spree there. You don't want Dickie, do you, Rachel?"

He tried to give a knowing wink and an entreating glance at his sister; but Rachel was looking moodily away. She replied with some testiness, thinking that Eddie was too fond of "sprees" and that they would only be having drinks till dinner-time up at The Towers.

"I am very glad to see Richard this evening; if he likes, why should he not come in?"

Whereupon Dickie, with a look of triumph at his friend, stumbled up the steps; while Eddie, unlucky youth, turned with a disgusted sigh into the study. Poor lad, he felt that his sister had misjudged him. Yet, had she only known it, Eddie, for her sake, had tried his best all day to dissuade Darke from drinking more than was good for him. "Give

a dog a name," said the lad to himself, sitting down with a dispirited air, and resting his head on his hand. "Still, Rachel might have trusted me to know best. Where is the good of a brother if he may not stand by his sisters? Why, Darke is beastly drunk!"

Meanwhile in the drawing-room whence Marion had discreetly slipped away, Eddie's fears were being justified. Darke showed himself so boisterously affectionate that Rachel's repugnance of the last two days to his wooing strengthened into downright opposition.

She tried coldness, but Dickie became maudlin. She relented a little, hating to see tears rise so readily to his eyes, though not yet guessing their true source. Thereupon with tenfold tenderness he made matters worse than ever. Rachel lost her temper. Dickie redoubled his now somewhat rude caresses, and, laughingly tipsily, declared that she was in a huff.

His speech was becoming more thick every minute; and at last the truth dawned upon Rachel's indignant mind, when Dickie, by way of making

friends, forcibly tried to embrace her, while his breath smelt so strongly of brandy that her spirit rose in disgust.

She lost all self-control, and pushing him passionately away, cried out :

“You have been drinking! You are not fit to come near me. Go away! I will have nothing to say to you.”

“Go away! I like that!” hiccoughed Dickie. “You’ll *have* to marry me; then ’ll drink as much as I like all day. Marry me next week if I please. I’ve got the whip-hand now.”

“I will *not* marry you. No—never!”

The words left Rachel’s lips almost before she knew their meaning; but a great relief seemed to calm her the moment they were said.

Darke was furious. He tried threats, beseechings, expostulations. Rachel livid with anger, while her lips were firm set, still held to her passionate declaration. It seemed to her like an anchor in a storm.

“I will see your father this minute; I will speak to him. He will bring you to your senses!” raved

Dickie, his eyes now almost starting out of his head. "He will teach you, Miss Impudence, how you ought to behave yourself."

"He will not allow me to be insulted," retorted Rachel in her girlish pride. For, youth being ever severe in its judgments, she felt outraged and disgusted that the man to whom she was engaged should be as coarse, even brutal, in his expressions, as Dickie during this scene had once or twice shown himself.

"I will go and see the old fellow this minute."

Out stormed Dickie into the garden, and lurched against the laboratory door, bursting it open and almost falling into the room.

Rachel, standing at the open window, heard a surprised exclamation from Wayland. Next the latter himself closed the door, and only a confused murmur of men's voices in wrathful dispute within met her ear.

At that Rachel's knees began to quake, and her boasted courage leaked somehow out of the inner woman as if it were kept in a sieve.

What had she done? She loathed the thought

now of becoming Richard Darke's wife. But her father—would he be ruined?

"I say, has there been a row?" murmured Eddie penitently in her ear.

Then as she looked round, and the boy saw the great disturbance in her face, a scowl came upon his, and he eagerly hurried out.

"Look here, Rachel, he is not half good enough for you. If you split with him I will stand by you, whatever any one may say. I tell you only this: he is a drunken beast!"

At that moment Marion's voice was heard approaching and, like two guilty conspirators, Rachel and Eddie slipped apart.

CHAPTER XVI.

“**WHAT** do you mean, sir? What is the meaning of this, Richard Darke?” was Hilary Wayland’s low-toned question as he closed the door, and in a glance saw by Dickie’s flushed face and unsteady bearing what ailed the latter.

“It means that I have come to you to keep your daughter to her word. She’s said she won’t marry me. I say she shall!”

Dickie banged the table with his fist, upsetting some cells, and thereby ruining a cherished small experiment over which Wayland had been spending the morning.

Wayland, as has been said, was a man of passionate nature, but sweet-tempered, and, above all things, he strove to be just. For Rachel’s sake he tried to control himself, to soothe the young fellow, and, at the same time, inquire into the matter. But be-

ing a most moderate man in the matter of drink himself, and this match having been secretly distasteful to him from the first, it was almost with joy that he tried to argue with this unwished-for son-in-law that it might be best to part good friends.

The discussion lasted perhaps half an hour, Dickie becoming more and more passionate, even insolent. That Hilary Wayland would brook from no man. His temper rose too; all the more hotly from having been so long kept in check. As ill-luck would have it, a bottle marked brandy, stood near, holding methylated spirits, which Wayland had been using in an experiment. Dickie seized it, and, pouring out half a tumblerful with unsteady hand, had gulped it down before Wayland, who had turned away at that moment, could prevent him.

"I say she shall marry me!" shouted Dickie, wiping his lips; "and I tell you, old feller, you must force her to do it."

"What! Force a daughter of mine to marry any man—above all, you, you tipsy young scoundrel Never!" thundered Wayland in return.

"Then, I will ruin you, by Heaven! You shall pay me that money you owe me at once. Do you hear?"

"I will pay you. You shall be paid within a week, if I am beggared by it."

"You think to catch Lord St. Ermins instead for your girl," went on Dickie incoherently; "but I will stop that game——Ruin his bleach mills——ruin you——"

"Out you go this instant!"

And Wayland, springing as lightly to his feet as a boy, threw open the door.

Dickie leaned against the wall of the room, eyeing the door impotently—a miserable spectacle of humanity, brutalised by drink.

Wayland looked at him for a few moments, as the young man's head drooped more and more and his eyes became vacant.

"He will drown himself in the brook, or perhaps turn back into the house and frighten the girls, unless I see him home," was his disgusted reflection.

Putting on his hat and coat with hasty determination, he half-ordered, half-persuaded Darke out of

the workshop, and so across the garden and meadow toward The Towers wood.

Rachel, from her bedroom upstairs, saw them thus go. Dickie making his way unsteadily down the garden, her father acting as buffer between him and the fruit wall, while the young man's wrangling, angry voice became fainter upon the summer air.

Then she drew back and saw her own face, white as a ghost, in the mirror on the dressing-table. With a great start she recognised another face looking over her shoulder with a searching expression.

It was Nurse Gibson.

"I came in here a minute ago, but you did not hear me. I am afraid you are in trouble, Miss Rachel," said Gibson, respectfully, but with a kindly, pitying intonation.

"In trouble? Yes. Do you know what I have done?"

And Rachel, sinking on a chair, caught Gibson's wrist with feverish fingers, and, looking up hysterically in that resolute, handsome face, whispered awestruck, that she had broken off her engagement with Mr. Darke.

"I thought it would come to this. There! Don't take on, my dear. Believe me, he is not good enough for you! He is not a good man—and you will never be happy with one that is not."

"He is not good if he drinks. But why do you say so? What do you know?" vaguely repeated Rachel.

Nurse Gibson vouchsafed no direct reply, but, repeated, with consoling firmness:

"You see, Miss Rachel, marriage is a very serious thing. Why should you bind yourself to a gentleman you don't care for? You can free yourself now; but, once married, you can't."

"That is true; I can. I have done it. Thanks, Nurse! Now, if you leave me, perhaps I should be better alone."

The door shut upon Nurse Gibson's retiring figure, and Rachel put her hands to her hot head. It was true; she could still free herself. Nay, she had done it! She was free—she *was* free.

Left alone, the idea took hold of her mind for the first time. Oh, the delicious relief to feel that she need never more endure the distasteful presence of

her lover ; that his endearments—to which she had so reluctantly submitted—were put away like a thing of the past. Rachel rose to her full height, stretched out her arms, and, filling her lungs with a deep-drawn breath, exclaimed :

“ Yes ; the world is before me.”

Then, starting at the sound of her own voice, she looked round frightened, lest any one should have heard her, and ashamed.

“ Heaven knows I never accepted him for my own sake,” she murmured to herself, her lips moving soundlessly. “ Never ! What do I care about his riches ? Do I ask anything more of Fate than to live happily here, working for my dear ones ? It was for father’s sake, and to help all the others.”

With poignant grief, thinking that her attempted sacrifice was a mere failure, that she had only behaved badly, after all, to Dickie Darke, without doing any good to her family, Rachel hung her head. Her passionate wrath had been succeeded by a moment of almost delirious joy at feeling mistress of herself once more. Now she felt humbled, as if convicted of base selfishness. After all, she was

only an impulsive young soul, whose affections swayed her this way and that; self-control was a lesson she had yet to learn in life. Poor Rachel!

"I will go down and meet father," was her next thought; and so she crept downstairs through the garden, and waited by the little turnstile into the meadow. Some consoling thoughts flitted over her mind meanwhile. Her dear daddie had not wished her from the first to marry Darke. Eddie, too, had called him by a severe epithet, and thought him no fit husband for her; and Eddie knew what he was saying, she felt.

All the same, Rachel blamed herself bitterly for not having been more sure of her own feelings.

"If he called me a jilt, I suppose it would be true."

So she thought to herself sadly, and looked out over the meadow where her father's figure was now returning in sight, dark against the low golden beams of the now westering sun.

When Wayland came close up to his daughter, Rachel saw that his face was pale and stern-set; he was breathing hard through his slightly dis-

tended nostrils, a trick of his when strongly stirred, at which his children often laughed when the mood was over, telling him he showed his high breeding, like a thoroughbred horse. There was a fire still burning in Hilary's blue eyes, that only softened a little as Rachel's look met his gaze. His lips were moving, for he was talking to himself as he came walking fast down the path beside the stream ; and with a rumpled coat, and his hat crammed on the back of his head, his appearance was unusually disordered.

Rachel cried out low, with some despair in her voice.

" Oh, father ! what has happened ? "

" Nothing, nothing, my child. I have settled the rascal."

" Come into the workshop and tell me quietly all about it," entreated his daughter, seeing the agitation in her parent's face.

Wayland mutely consented, and they went without another word up the garden walk into the laboratory. When the door closed behind them Hilary looked round, and then his glance fell and rested

long, as in a despairing, almost broken-hearted farewell, upon his idol—his darling model of the electric primary battery. Next he dropped upon a broken-backed cane-chair beside the carpenter's bench, and rested his head in his hands with a long-drawn sound.

“Hi-o-o-o.”

The sound began on a high note, and came down in jerks. It meant that Hilary would not give way to a groan, and was struggling to console himself for one more of the fleeting hopes of earth vanishing away.

Rachel stood opposite him, her heart bursting with sympathy, her nerves tingling to know all that had passed.

As her father looked up at the girl's tall, vigorous figure, and beautiful face aglow with youth and health, a thought passed over his mind like a momentarily cooling breeze, that, though little remained for him in future to hope for now, yet her young life, of such rich promise, might yet be happy.

“What has happened, daddie? What have you done to him?” implored Rachel.

“Never mind, my darling. The rascal shall never trouble you again, I promise. I cannot say more now. Oh, dear, dear, dear!”

And again came that long, quivering sound; but it was more of a groan this time.

Rachel came nearer, and put her arms about his neck, kissed his forehead with her warm, soft lips, whispering :

“You are sighing over the electric battery. Is that it? Ah! and I never remembered in my selfishness about the money *he* lent you.”

“No matter, my child; you did the right thing. Some other man will follow out my idea some day, and become famous—yes, some day. Well, no matter. I was first on the track; they can never gainsay that. My name will not be known, maybe; but that has been the lot of many a better man in the paths of science before me.”

There was a silence in the workshop; a fly buzzed against the pane. “Do not grieve, Rachel. I would do it again. By Heaven! yes, I would. You ought to be free—you are free. The drunken young hound! Only now leave me, my child; I am not fit to

talk to you. Leave me, Rachel. Go away, dear."

And as the girl turned away with hushed footfall and backward stealing glance, she saw her father turn, and leaning both his arms upon the bench, lay down his head upon them, stifling a groan.

CHAPTER XVII.

UP to her own room, with set lips, Rachel went swiftly. There she sat for full five minutes with one arm flung over her head, in an unconsciously dramatic attitude, thinking. Three times, then, she paced up and down, her arms down-dropped by her side, her fingers clenching and unclenching themselves, while her white forehead was puckered into a frown of desperate thought, and her eyes were staring straight forward.

Then her mind was made up. She caught up her hat, thrust her arms into a jacket, and running downstairs, slammed the front door behind her, and went up the road with long, eager strides.

An hour had not yet passed since Richard Darke had been turned from the Red House, a rejected lover; and now Rachel was hurrying up the long

hill that led to The Tower, between oak coppices, on purpose to do what at any other moment would have seemed an unmaidenly thing. She meant to tell Dickie that she had changed her mind again, and was ready to marry him. He must promise to reform, to become more steady. Oh, it would be easy enough to make him say he was sorry! Why, he would grovel for a word of kindness from her; he would cringe while she chid him, that she knew, if only she would consent again to become his wife. Whether the promises would be kept was a different matter.

Rachel had no illusions about her proposed future as she went on with quick, energetic steps. At the sight of her father's grief she had made up her mind to fulfil the sacrifice from which she had so lately shrunk: only this time she would set a price upon herself. Dickie must swear to her first to hold her father free of debt, yet never to let him know the bargain.

"I am worth some thousands, or ought to be, to him," declared Rachel to herself, with high spirit; "he shall have me at the price of the battery; but

none of them must know it—not Marion—not even Eddie.”

She rang at the gates of the big new lodge leading to The Towers, and was let through with surprised looks by the gatekeeper. Her engagement was already whispered in the neighbourhood, however, which accounted somewhat for the visit.

The approach wound in three loops, through clumps of young trees up to the house she had so hated. It looked more ugly than ever this summer’s evening, with its terrace laid out in flaring ribbon borders of geranium and calceolarias; white blinds pulled down everywhere along its new red-brick façade, “Just as if some one was dead here,” thought Rachel, with a half shudder, as she waited at the door.

Two footman answered her summons. (Dickie Darke was proud to feel that he kept up his establishment in style.)

“Mr. Darke had not come home yet,” they said; “he had left that morning with young Mr. Wayland, for the pigeon match. They were certain he had not since returned.”

Rachel looked round her in puzzled indecision, and then went slowly across the terrace. A path led through a long, straggling wood down to the water-meadow, where it followed the edge of the stream to the Red House garden. It was by this short path that Dickie was always wont to visit his neighbours, the Waylands. Rachel had only gone round the longer way by the highroad with a feeling of propriety. It had instinctively seemed more correct to visit her suitor's bachelor house on such an errand by the highroad and Lodge gates, rather than use his private paths, when, for the moment, she was no longer engaged to him.

Rachel had found it hard to control her inner agitation under the footmen's inquisitive eyes, and now her under-lip was quivering as she continually bit it.

What would Dickie think if she did not meet him at all? Or she might come upon him at any corner grumbling at a gardener's boy, or scolding a keeper. The state of his temper would be, no doubt, more than disagreeable.

"He may have calmed down since this afternoon,"

she thought, trying to reassure herself, though with sinking heart. The prospect of offering herself to a young man, who was only recovering from his afternoon's excesses, was one from which the high-spirited girl almost revolted in soul.

It was pleasant in the wood this warm July day, and presently, as no voice broke the solitude, Rachel's beating pulses calmed a little, thanks to the shade and the cool evening breeze that played through the leaves.

What could have become of Dickie ? she wondered, as she presently found herself half-way down the wood, and still no sign of Darke met eye or ear.

The tall trees joined overhead ; a blackbird was whistling in the undergrowth ; a squirrel ran across the path and scuttled up a tree, whence it looked down upon her from safety. Just round the bend of the path there was a rustic seat, and as Rachel's eyes fell upon it she thought for a moment of resting there. One moment only—the next she was startled to see a man lying on the ground beyond it. Surely a man, yet he looked like a limp heap of clothes. In another instant Rachel recognised that

it was Dickie himself who lay there, with one arm outstretched, and his face upturned, staring with wide, unseeing eyes.

“ He has fainted ; he is insensible ! ” rushed to her mind.

She threw herself down upon her knees, and brushed some flies away that were settling upon his face. Its expression appalled her. Why, why did he stare like that ? with his mouth open, and that strange ashen hue upon his generally ruddy countenance. She must loosen his neckcloth ; get water. Even as she thus rapidly resolved a blue mark upon the man’s left temple fascinated her gaze. Turning away her horrified eyes, they fell upon Dickie’s gold-mounted walking-stick, which lay close by—a heavy one, with a loaded top, of which he was wont to be proud, calling it his life-preserve .

“ Oh, God ! ”

A soundless scream broke from Rachel’s parted lips. Her heart stopped beating as she sprang to her feet, and looked a moment wildly around as if calling the trees, sky, earth, to witness that surely this deed could not have been done. And yet she knew it

was true. Dickie Darke lay at her feet—*murdered!*

No need to think of remedies now, and succour and warnings. Though she had never seen a dead face before, she recognised the awful fact.

“Father, father!” she moaned aloud, with a terrible anguish creeping slowly, surely, over her, bearing down mercilessly a weak inner outcry that *he* could not have done it.

As the poor girl stood there, dizzy with horror and pain, the earth seemed rocking under her feet, the trees moving around. Hilary Wayland’s words were ringing again in her ears :

“He will never trouble you any more. Leave me, my child, I am not fit to speak to you.”

Then somehow Rachel got away down the path, torn by conflicting impulses, as if demons were struggling in her soul. Terror seemed to urge her mind forward, as on wings; yet surely her body was dragging, lagging heavily; while an awful attraction seemed drawing her backward, crying she should not leave Dickie like this. She ought to return to that lonely corpse in the wood, and brush the flies off its face.

Yet all the while she was running, running madly till she reached the edge of the wood. There an appalled feeling took possession of her that beyond its covert she was no longer screened. Now she must walk quietly and calmly, though the meadow was lonely, lest any eye from afar should notice her haste and guess the guilty secret.

So, with her heart beating heavily and with quaking knees, Rachel forced herself to walk with apparent calm along the riverside path. The stream beside her seemed to run red at moments. Was it fancy, or only that her eyes emerging from the wood had seen the sun sinking in a blood-red globe, and that the color had impressed itself upon her vision? Red, red patches of blood seemed to dance mysteriously over the lush grass before her horror-dazed gaze.

The only clear thought in her mind now was to betray nothing; to hide the terrible news for her father's sake. No one must guess; no living soul.

Slowly up into her room Rachel crept once more, bearing her awful secret in her breast. Only half an hour ago she had thought herself miserable when

she left it to go forth on her futile errand of sacrifice. Miserable! She little knew then what misery meant.

Oh, to take back the words that had led to the deeds of this dreadful afternoon! Miserable—most miserable! She sank heavily upon her bed, like an inert creature. She could not pray, she could not think; but through it all came the dreadful recurring thought:

“Oh, father! father! How could you do it? And it was for my sake!”

Too well she could picture it all, knowing Hilary Wayland's tender heart, but wild impulses of wrath especially when stirred in the defence of any weak creature. It was like summer lightning—he absolutely could not control himself at such moments. No doubt the other—the dead man—had spoken insultingly of her, and one quick blow had ended everything.

The supper-bell clanged loudly through the house, and Rachel knew she must rouse herself, smooth her dress and hair, and come downstairs as if nothing had happened.

Marion was pouring out the tea ; the children and boys were laughing round the table. It was really dreadful to have to sit there and pretend to eat, while those around her knew nothing of what had happened. Only Eddie noticed that Rachel broke her bread, but never swallowed anything. He stole one or two sympathising looks, then tried to divert the attention of the children by surreptitiously throwing up gooseberries, and catching them in his mouth like a clown.

Supper over, Rachel could bear it no longer ; and, feeling sick in body as in mind, crept back again to her own room, and lay down on her bed in the twilight, hiding her agonised face in the pillow, and clenching the quilt with her hands.

Presently Marion knocked at the door, and came in.

“What is the matter, dear ? Will you not come downstairs to prayers ?”

“No ! I have a dreadful headache. Please do not ask me, Marion.”

The latter hesitated, having gathered that something had gone amiss between Darke and Rachel

that afternoon ; yet she did not like to appear inquisitive. Then she urged, with soothing cheeriness :

“ Well, but don’t you think you could come and say good-night to mother, dear ? She is always restless till you do. She complained just now she had hardly seen you all day.”

“ To, mother ? Yes. I am coming.”

And Rachel struggled up, and almost stumbled—she felt so blind with grief and fear—towards the invalid’s room.

Mrs. Wayland had just been put to bed for the night by Nurse Gibson. She looked as if never was a patient better taken care of, propped up comfortably with pillows, and with a little array of medicines and restoratives, for possible use through the night, close at hand.

But she was more fretful than usual, and apparently wandering in her mind.

“ Somebody has been burning rabbit-skins in the next room, in my sitting-room,” she complained. “ They smell badly. And I have been alone nearly all day ; alone this evening for hours. My handker-

chief fell, and there was no one to pick it up, and I wanted it."

"Why, Nurse never left you, darling," said Marion, soothingly. "You know I stayed with you all this afternoon till nearly five o'clock; and then she came, and I went away."

Nurse Gibson looked on pityingly at this little scene.

"Never mind," she whispered, "it is only a fancy. You know she never *is* alone for a minute; but she has been fretting for Miss Rachel, and if she misses her she thinks everything goes wrong."

A little later Nurse Gibson came, with some brown paper and vinegar, to find Rachel. The latter was in bed, but the good woman insisted upon doing her best to alleviate the headache from which she believed Miss Bonnie was suffering.

"I can quite believe your head must be splitting with all the worry you have had this day," she said kindly, as she tucked her young lady in comfortably.

"Ah, that's right," said Marion, who had followed her to the door, "you are a real comfort to us, Nurse. Now, we will leave Miss Rachel alone; she is best so."

CHAPTER XVIII.

RACHEL lay upon her bed, forcing herself to outward quiet, even while she was craving to be rid of the affectionate importunities of Marion and Nurse Gibson. But when their steps died away she tore the bandage from her burning forehead, and, half rising in the darkness, buried her elbows in the pillow, and supporting her head in her hands, stared into the darkness with straining ears and wildly dilated eyes. An awful longing tugged at her heartstrings to tell some one else, to crave help in keeping her terrible secret. She longed to shriek and shriek and shriek aloud; then she stuffed her bed-clothes into her mouth till she had fought down the hysterical temptation.

She only knew why their father had not come to supper to-night, and no one else guessed. It seemed too horrible! And surely, he ought to fly; it was

madness to stay on here? Marion must advise—— But no, no! She could not tell poor Marion, who was too good herself to understand rightly daddie's fiery wrath as did Rachel herself, who had the like passionate impulses.

Why, Marion might go melancholy mad with the shock. After all, the secret might be kept, and she, dear saint, would love and respect him with the same even tenor of filial devotion all his days. Eddie? No; that would not do, either. He would be sympathetic, even if horrified, Rachel guessed—— wild, warm-hearted boy. Still he would be obliged to tell his father that he knew all in order to urge the old man to seek safety; and Wayland's daughter, in her tender-hearted capacity for putting herself in another's place, imagined the shame that would bow daddie's dear old head before the scapegrace son, who had so often endured his parent's severe reproofs.

A thousand times no! Rachel must speak herself——alone bear the burden of that guilty secret, that terrible fear; and yet her heart turned sick within her at thoughts of looking in her father's face

now, and whispering: she had seen *that thing* lying in the wood. Yet, if her anguish was so great, what might be his, tortured as he must be by remorse, fears, thoughts of his sick wife and his children? Oh, presently, when all the house was quiet, Rachel would certainly rise and steal to him, console and urge him to seek his own safety for all their sakes. So the slow time passed. A cuckoo-clock wheezingly called the hour outside in the passage. At last steps came quietly towards her door, which was an unusual thing. There followed a soft knock. Then the handle turned, and Hilary Wayland's voice whispered in the darkness:

"Are you sleeping, my child? I do not want to waken you; but you are the only person in all the house who can help me at this moment. I am in great difficulty, my dear child, so I know you will forgive me for disturbing you."

Gone were Rachel's doubts and fears of being with this poor father face to face. With one bound she was on the floor and groping for her slippers and dressing-gown.

"Wait, I will strike a light," she whispered

back. Then, after fumbling for the matches with trembling hands, at last the candle was lit, and she gazed, pale as death, with wide, dark eyes, at her father, who had softly shut the door.

Wayland still wore the same rather dishevelled clothes he had on that afternoon; his long grey hair was pushed back from his temples, and there was an eager troubled look in his face.

"*I know what you are going to tell me,*" whispered Rachel. "*There is no time to lose*" (bringing out the last words with a gulp).

"How did you know, dear one? Did Eddie tell you?" asked Wayland, in a dazed manner, pressing his hands upon his brows. "I did tell him something about it, when he came to call me at supper time; and now he has come back to do his best to help me. Poor boy! I have been rather hard on him lately, and, after all, he is a good lad. But you are right, time is precious. I have left Eddie on guard down there."

"Dearest daddie, O dear, dear father, it has been all my fault, only mine; but can you not save yourself? Fly, I entreat of you, while there is time."

"What for? There is no such immediate danger, believe me, my dear child."

"But to save yourself from the possible consequences. I mean—*Richard Darke*."

Rachel brought out the name with a convulsive effort, in a sort of whispered wail.

"Yes, yes, yes," murmured Wayland, staring straight forward as if confused. Then looking round at her, with a kindly pitying shake of the head. "Do not fret your poor little heart about what is done. Blot out the past and forget it, and go back to bed and sleep. Do not be frightened; trust me and Eddie to deal with that. It is a matter for men."

Despite his parental soothing, there was a stern brevity about the latter words that struck Rachel with awed fear.

"Now, dear, will you help me; quick?"

"Of course I will. *Anything*. What shall I do?"

"Then give me all the hairpins you can spare."

Was he going mad at remembrance of the deed he had done? Rachel absolutely felt sick with this new terror, and gazed at him dismayed.

"Hairpins! What for?"

"Yes, hairpins. Because—it is such a pity, isn't it?—they have never sent me that copper wire from London to finish my electric battery. Ah, here are some." Wayland's eyes had wandered to the dressing-table, and his face lit up with such a look of sudden satisfaction that it seemed to Rachel a new sign of disordered intellect. Grasping his prizes too hurriedly, some hairpins fell, and her father began groping over the floor, while maundering in disconnected sentences. "Have I never told you the story of one of our most learned professors who invented the microphone, by which the ticking of a watch can be heard a mile off, and he made most of his experiments with his wife's hairpins stuck together with sealing wax. . . . I found some sealing wax in Marion's davenport, and laid violent hands on it. . . . I was a thief. . . . There! Are these all you can spare me? May I look in this drawer? Thank you; thanks, my child, these are all. See, I will leave you these two tortoiseshell ones; they will do for putting up your hair in the morning;" and with

an apologetic air, Wayland tried to make his escape towards the door.

Rachel, who had felt dumfounded with surprise and consternation during this little scene, now felt as if the last chance of saving him was slipping from her grasp. She hurriedly followed and caught him by the sleeve.

"Oh, leave this battery alone, dear," she besought, "to-night of all nights. Don't touch it; don't!"

"Don't stop me. I must get on with it at once; every moment is of priceless value. Why, I believe I see my way to get rid of that polarisation in the cells; I told you that when the battery was made on a commercial principle that would not be noticed."


"But, daddie, for my sake; think of all that has happened this dreadful day through my mad foolishness. How can any good come of the battery *now*? Never, never! Heaven help us! Oh, think of Richard!"

"My God! I do remember! It is a sword hanging over my head. That is why every moment is like gold to me to-night," broke in Wayland, with desperation in his voice. "Why, before morning

dawns, girl, do you not understand that I may have discovered what has baffled me so long? Then you and your brothers and sisters will be beyond all fear of want, and I could die happy to-morrow. Child, you are too soft-hearted ; and yet you did not even love this man. Can you not have some thought now for your poor old father, who has spent nights and days toiling and hoping for this one thing? And, now that the decisive moment may have come, a hundred Richard Darkes should not stop me, dead or alive, whatever may happen to-morrow."

He waved his hand as if spurning his enemies, while the fire in his eyes and the quick breathing that came through his distended nostrils warned Rachel that further entreaties were useless.

In these moods Hilary Wayland seemed, in his children's eyes, inspired with such dogged resolve and courage as had David's mighty captains of old, when they could burst through a host of spearmen. "Dead or alive, he would do this thing or that; neither man nor devil should stop him," was one of his favourite sayings.



Next minute he was gone, and Rachel was alone.

The girl wrung her hands in her distress; then she sank in her chair, and clasped her hands round her knees like an unconscious image of misery. Presently she sprang up at a sudden thought and blew out the candle.

“They might notice the light so late in the house and think it strange,” she told herself. “All the neighbours know that father works late down in the laboratory, so that would give no cause for suspicion; on the contrary——”

She was growing cunning. Oh! it behoved her to think of every little detail that would help to shield daddy, if he would not try to save himself. He had been mad to-day—mad with wrath. Now he was toiling like a madman down there only for his children’s sake; fears for their future so filled his mind that there was no room for fear for himself, or remorse as yet—that must be it.

A thousand confused plans followed each other through poor Rachel’s exhausted brain till it grew dizzy, as she sat there in the dark. At last she could not think clearly; but could not stop thinking. The

one terrible problem remained unsolved : Would her father be suspected of murder ? Then she wondered if the corpse out yonder in the darkness had been found yet. She shuddered, imagining how the night dews would fall on that poor clammy face, while the wild creatures of fields and woods that steal out at night must wonder what the dead man did there. Then terror of the nameless *they* who might be searching for Richard Darke, at this very moment, seized her ; perhaps she might even see lights in the wood. Trembling, Rachel crept to the window, and, kneeling there, softly raised the blind a few inches. All still ; no lanterns twinkling through the summer darkness. On a sudden she started violently ; her hair felt as if rising with superstitious terror, and the very marrow of her bones freezing.

What was it ? That white shadowy figure gliding up the garden path from the meadow.

Three o'clock struck from the church tower half a mile away across the fields.

On the ghostly thing came, gliding towards the house—nearer—nearer. Rachel might have screamed, but that no sound would come from her

lips, she was so paralysed with terror. It was, it must be, *he*—the murdered man's spirit, taking the well-known path by which he had so often come to visit herself, his false sweetheart.

With one bound Rachel sprang into bed and drew the clothes over her head, trembling lest if she looked out into the darkness Dickie's spirit face should meet her horror-struck eyes.

CHAPTER XIX.

RACHEL did not stir till the dawn came. She lay with her head hidden under the bedclothes, almost senseless with fright, too faint even to think. But when at last the cheerful crowing of cocks in the fowl-yard, and the noisy chatter of starlings in the ivy round her window, penetrated through the blanket to her ears, she looked out with a pale face. Then, taking courage, she drew up her blinds to let the sunlight in, feeling that with it the ghostly figure that had so frightened her last night must have vanished away. And so, in the full light, she lay down again with the sun shining on her bed, and fell asleep heavily, out of sheer exhaustion.

When Rachel woke again it was to find her shoulder being shaken, while little Connie kept calling in her ear :

“Bonnie, it is breakfast-time!”

"What has happened, eh? What is the matter? Quick! What is it? What do you say?"

And Rachel, starting up, terrified, stared at the astonished child while struggling to collect her scattered senses.

"Don't be frightened," returned Constance, in soothing patronage; "Eddie sent me to see if you were not coming. He wants to see you very particularly. Marion is very late, too; but she has been kept with mother this morning. Mother is not just quite as well as usual."

"Eddie? Yes; O yes! I will be down immediately—very soon. Tell him so, Connie. Go, dear."

Never had Rachel hurried her dressing so, even in the bygone days at school, when the young pupil-teacher had overslept herself, and feared reprimands. Somehow or other she twisted up her brown masses of hair on her head in a great knot, kept in place by two big tortoiseshell hairpins—the only ones her father had left.

Then she hurried downstairs, where Eddie awaited her with a singularly pale and quiet aspect.

"Have some tea, Bonnie?" he asked in a me-

chanical voice, striving as awkwardly as most men do to dissemble when about to attempt the almost impossible task of breaking bad news gently.

"Has anything happened?" Rachel grasped his shoulder with no light hand. "Eddie, speak out! Do not deceive me. I cannot bear waiting. Has—has——"

She tried to say "father"; but the word stuck in her throat.

"There is some bad news, dear," began Eddie, gently, "though I do trust you will not take it as much to heart as if it had happened two days ago. There has been an accident to poor Dickie. You know he was beastly tipsy yesterday. It seems unfair to speak ill of him now, unfortunate fellow; but, still, it is the truth. He never went home last night, it seems, and this morning they found——"

"Found what? Go on; quick! quick!" reiterated Rachel, her nerves strained to the highest tension.

"Do not be shocked; but they found him at six this morning, lying in the wood. He must have fallen on the ground, and struck his head against a

stone. It all happened accidentally, dear ; but he is dead."

And that was all. After putting her to such torture during these seconds of waiting for his tidings. An accident !

Some strange change of emotion came over Rachel that she could not understand, and she burst into a wild fit of laughing. The more Eddie stared at her, horrified, the more hysterically she laughed, while Marion, stealing in at the door with a terrified, inquiring glance, joined Eddie in vain attempts to silence this unseemly mirth.

"It's awful, isn't it ! It's worse than crying," repeated poor Eddie, blankly. "I say, Bonnie, do pull yourself together ! Of course, *we* understand, Marion and I, but what will the servants think, if they hear you—or the governor ? He may be downstairs to breakfast any minute."

To his astonishment Rachel ceased laughing as suddenly as she had begun. The thought of her father acted magically in banishing the real grief for her unhappy lover that had momentarily possessed her mind.

"You must think me crazed," she said, apologetically, to the other two. "My head feels quite queer. I wish I could cry; but I can't."

Eddie once more insisted that she must swallow some tea; and then the brother and two sisters in vain urged each other to eat a little this morning, while whispering in murmurs together, with awe-struck faces.

Marion explained how the news had been told her at eight o'clock, but that she would not disturb her sister till the latter came downstairs; and, indeed, hoped it was not selfish, but she was thankful that Eddie had consented to tell Rachel the shocking occurrence.

Then Eddie recounted how he and his father had been sitting up till nearly six o'clock this morning over an experiment which had lasted right through the night.

"Oh, I have had two hours' sleep, and am all right," he ended; "but I hope dad will take another hour or so. He was terribly disheartened, poor dear old father, last night."

"Why! What happened? How did the experi-

ment turn out? ” broke in Rachel. “ I know it was the great one he was making for the electric battery.”

Eddie slowly wagged his head.

“ Failure again.”

What, a failure ! After all the hopes that had buoyed her unfortunate father last night up above his sea of troubles. The last plank snatched, as it were, from a drowning man’s despairing grasp. And he had been so certain of success.

With a wild feeling that thus we mere human ants struggle in vain against the all-powerful decrees of fate, Rachel felt so oddly tickled at the vanity of weak mortals striving to combat their mysterious destinies that once again her discordant laugh rang out uncontrollably. Marion tried embracing her with entreating caresses, which only made matters worse. Rachel buried her face in her handkerchief, struggling almost in a convulsion. Eddie did her more good.

“ Shut up ! ” he growled in so furious a tone that Marion started, looking at him reproachfully. “ Stop that noise at once, and drink some cold water ! ”

He grasped his sister's shoulder as he spoke, with the apparent intention of giving her a sound shaking, while his frowns and nods at Marion implied that it was kindness to be cruel.

He was right. Rachel's cachinnation grew fainter, and when it ceased she said, with real tears running down her cheeks :

"Thank you, Eddie dear. Yes, water. I am glad you stopped me."

"I am glad you do not think me a brute," the boy smiled back. "But now I think I had better go and see about getting those young shavers, Freddie and Bobbie, off to school. They are loafing about, gossiping over all this down the road."

The phrase signified that a few yards from the Waylands' door stood a cluster of cottages, one of them being also a small inn. Here lived the Red House gardener ; the sexton of the church ; also the carpenter and handy-man who occasionally helped Wayland with his experiment. A tree in front of the inn was the gossip resort for all neighbours within a mile up and down the road.

Hardly had Eddie departed, with a new air of

helpful manliness that sat very well upon his shoulders, and Rachel dried her eyes, feeling recovered, than there came a fresh alarm. The door burst open after a small body had been apparently used as a projectile against it, and Ethel, the youngest but one of the Wayland children, almost tumbled into the room, panting, and with an air of gratified importance as the bearer of weighty news.

"Mother is very ill. She is taken very bad, Nurse says. Nurse wants you both to come *at once*."

As the sisters hurried upstairs side by side, Marion hastily, but vainly, tried to dissuade Rachel from assisting.

"You are still upset, dear; you have had enough to bear this morning. Do not mind. It can only be one of her usual slight faints. Nurse and I can manage it quite well without you."

"No, no. Don't try to hinder me, please, Marion; it will help to keep me from thinking all the time."

They found the poor woman upstairs lying apparently in a dead faint, the sign that she had undergone a fresh seizure of paralysis. Each time that these numbing strokes occurred, those watching about

the invalid could not know for some time whether she might ever recover from the attack or not. Marion immediately sent in haste for the doctor from St. Ermins, while all the means of restoring consciousness, to which they were only too well accustomed in the Red House, were tried by Nurse Gibson.

Both the girls felt more fearful and excited than usual till the doctor came, seeing that this stroke was more than ordinarily severe; while with trembling hands they executed this or that of Gibson's directions, under the latter's calm supervision.

"I hardly like to send for father, and yet perhaps he ought to know," murmured Marion, hesitating for once, though generally so resolute in the household management.

"No, no; don't let us. He is worn out and sleeping; it would be too much for him to bear. I mean after the disappointment about the battery last night," was Rachel's eager entreaty. "Time enough to tell him when the attack is over, and mother is better."

Presently the sick woman yawned several times

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with returning strength. By the time the doctor arrived a decided improvement had taken place, and a light of recognition was distinctly visible in her face as Rachel bent over her.

The doctor pronounced his patient in no immediate danger; and, so comforting them, left, with the promise that he would return later in the day.

After this, while her favourite daughter knelt beside her, the sick woman, between apparent dozes or pauses of half-unconsciousness, would open her eyes faintly, and keep her dull gaze fixed on the dark head she loved best of all theirs who were her children.

In vain Gibson, or poor sorrowful Marion, tried to attract her attention; Rachel's presence was all she seemed to care for. At last came an effort to speak. They could just catch three words, as Mrs. Wayland's mouth worked almost soundlessly.

"Bonnie—stay—dear."

Two hours had now passed since the first alarm of the seizure. Nurse Gibson, with her well-trained coolness at such times, quietly observed that if the young ladies would now remain in the room all

would be right for a while, and she would go to prepare a blister.

A few minutes after her departure the door gently opened, and a housemaid stood there, with a preternaturally solemn face, signing to Marion. The latter repulsed her with a gesture; for quiet was most necessary in the sick-room. There only followed fresh imploring beckonings and inaudible whispers.

With suppressed irritation, Marion felt constrained to go, as the easiest way of settling matters, hastily asking Rachel :

“Do you mind being left alone a few minutes? I will send Ethel to wait here as messenger ; she may be useful.”

“Yes, yes ; go. I can manage all right till you come back,” Rachel confidently murmured, beginning to apply eau-de-Cologne to the invalid’s temples, and then fanning her, for the morning was a hot one.

Feebly the mother’s hand began to stir on the sheet ; Rachel’s strong young one lovingly caressed it. Next the sick woman, with a greatly laborious

slow effort, laid one finger upon her child's hand
Not much of a detaining grasp in that faint pressure;
yet while minute after minute passed, and still no
one came, and she and the sick woman were left
alone together, Rachel felt unable to stir an inch
from the bedside, lest it might distress her mother.

Marion did not seek little Ethel as she had promised. The news whispered in her ear by the housemaid, with an air of outraged propriety, startled her instead into hurrying downstairs with a sudden sense that great dignity and self-possession were required under such extraordinary circumstances.

It may be added that the little girls, up till now, had been seated in the study, scrawling in their copy-books with grave airs of doing their duty. Each was writing a diary, dating from this momentous morning. For Ethel had suggested that this task seemed called for, feeling somehow unusually privileged in undergoing the shocks to their little minds that the morning had brought. First, the news of poor Dickie's tragic death, after his quarrel with sister Bonnie; and now mother was taken very ill *suddenly*.

"We ought to write it down," they agreed.

So they had just laboriously traced in big copy hand :

"Poor Dickie was very drunk, and he quarld with Daddie offly ; we heard them very loud, and we made mistakes in our French—" (here followed an attempt at the word "exercises," corrected by a smear of a small finger). "Bonnie said, Nurse says, that she wouldn't never marry such a bad young man, wich was quite rite. Daddie led him away by the meddo and came back aloan and now comes the offlest of all——"

The children had got so far when the study-door opened, and an indignant-looking parlour-maid ushered in two most surprising visitors—blue-coated, good-humoured looking men, yet at sight of whom both little girl slipped off their chairs with a frightened air, due to the bogeydom of their nursery.

"Now, Miss Ethel, Miss Connie, you must come away, dears. Leave your books there ; you can go on with your lessons afterwards," desired the maid with an unusually imperious air.

The little girls slipped timidly out of the room, while the kindly eyes of one of the burly visitors glanced in mere curiosity at the result of the children's joint efforts.

CHAPTER XX.

RACHEL began to think it very strange that no one came near her while she stayed in charge of her sick mother.

Mrs. Wayland still held her by a light touch on one hand, so that the daughter had only the other one free with which to perform the various little ministrations she thought necessary to her mother's comfort.

Why did Marion not send up Ethel, who, at least, might have sedulously waved a fan to and fro, and could have pulled down the blind; for the sunlight was beginning to creep round, and would be soon in the invalid's eyes?

Ten minutes had now passed—fifteen; twenty. It seemed to Rachel more like two hours. She was growing anxious and irritated by this apparent neglect. Nurse Gibson's blister must be prepared

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by now, and what message could keep Marion so long downstairs? Muffled sounds seemed to float from the hall below upstairs, along the passage, and through the closed door. This was unusual in the morning, and with her nerves all unstrung, Rachel felt on thorns, although somewhat calmed by the presence of the pale, quiet figure lying beside her, over which hovered the shadow of Death's wings.

In Mrs. Wayland's attacks, much—almost all—depended upon the care and nursing given her at the time being; and this responsibility weighing heavily upon Rachel's mind, she being less used than Marion to the office of sick-nurse, prevented her, perhaps mercifully, from guessing the cause of these noises in the house.

Presently the front door closed heavily; it was just beneath the sick-room window. Then sounded steps and voices on the road, as of several men going away. It must, oh! it must be something connected with poor Dickie's death!

Rachel longed to look out, but did not dare to; for at that very moment, as she stirred, her mother gave a feeble moan. The poor girl rose, at least, to

her feet, trembling through all her limbs, and gazing alternately at the window and at her mother's pallid face.

Ah, thank Heaven—at last! Marion came into the room, looking very white, though quite self-possessed. She was followed by Nurse Gibson, who on the other hand, showed signs of unusual agitation on her generally calm face.

“Come with me, dear, a minute; I must speak to you,” whispered Marion close in her sister's ear. “You can leave mother. Nurse will look after her, and one of the maids is coming, too.”

(Mrs. Wayland's hand closed with slightly more pressure upon her daughter's fingers.)

Rachel hesitated.

“Come away,” insisted Marion.

“Stay,” feebly moaned the sick woman.

Gibson came forward, and said with a professional air of cheerful determination to her patient:

“Now, then, my dear lady, you must let Miss Rachel leave you for a minute or two; she will come back again. But the doctor says you are to have some medicine.”

So saying, she pushed Rachel aside, removing the patient's hand with a quick gesture, so like harshness that Rachel's sudden choler was roused to protest.

“Don't be so rough!”

“Hush, hush!” interfered Marion, to her sister's surprise. “Nurse is quite right. Quick! I want you, dear.”

Drawing Rachel outside towards the window in the passage, Marion began to explain herself briefly, her breath coming short in indignation.

“You don't know what has happened downstairs, dear. The police have been here making inquiries about poor Dickie, you know. Oh, of course, it is quite right; it is their duty, and only a mere formality, you understand——”

“Go on, go on; quick!” came from between Rachel's half-clenched teeth, as she suppressed a gasp of agony, while her brows met in a quick frown, despite a strong effort at self-control.

“Well, there has been some foolish gossip about father and him quarrelling yesterday, and that Daddie was the last person who saw him alive; so

they came here just to ask. And father said 'Yes' when he came downstairs to see them; that he had left poor Richard in the wood. Then—oh, I do not know how it all came about. The police were very respectful, but said it was their painful duty to arrest him on suspicion and take him to Lord St. Ermins, as the nearest magistrate. They got the closed fly from the inn and drove—*Don't!*"

For a short, sharp scream had burst from Rachel's lips. Next instant it must have reached Mrs. Wayland's ears, for Nurse Gibson was heard calling to Marion. The latter, with a reproachful glance at her sister for such want of self-possession, hurried into the sick-room to give assistance, or rather, the assurance of all being well that their mother needed.

For a few seconds Rachel stood still, while great hammers seemed to be beating in her head from the throbbing of her pulses.

Then a sudden idea—it seemed an inspiration from above—flashed like a white light into her brain. She flew downstairs and through the hall, opened the door, and so out down the road, she knew not how.

Bareheaded and gloveless, she climbed the stile leading into the fields by the stream, and began running along the path down the wooded valley towards The Wilderness. The police were taking her father round by the road; hers was a short cut; she might yet arrive in time.

On, on Rachel ran with flying feet, past a meadow, sweet with dark red clover springing after the hay crop; now by the coppice on the cliff edge, where long bramble trails tried to catch at her as she passed, and honeysuckle hanging from the branches smote her in the face; burrs clung to her skirts, while long tendrils of convolvulus seemed tenderly trying to stop her. The path was little used, and was almost overgrown here.

How her heart was beating! But she must not stop for breath. Down fell a long trail of her rich, brown hair. One of the tortoise-shell pins had fallen, but she could not stop to pick it up.

Out again into the open meadow where the trout-stream ran full, lapping the long grasses on the banks, and the aspens shivered white under the

faint breeze that nought else seemed to notice on this warm July morning.

Her breath was labouring in short, convulsive sobs now. Her vision became suffused; but she must not stop. She must get to The Wilderness before they had taken her father away.

On, on, again, with slower and ever slower feet, the brave girl ran. Now the alder clumps were passed; she had reached the hazels beyond. And then—and then—— There was a gap in the hedge she remembered having tried in her childhood's days—an awkward, prickly place to clamber through, and, after that, a drop down a big bank into a paddock. Then, unless the garden wall had been built up of late, there were some notches in it from the bricks having mouldered away, where, by help of the overhanging branches of an apple-tree, she and Eddie had many a time climbed in to visit their especial friend, the old bailiff of the late Lord St. Ermins, who had used to live as caretaker in the house.

The only thought of hesitation that crossed Rachel's mind was, whether it was best to risk this

last short cut or to cross the road and go up the drive to The Wilderness by the longer way.

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Now to return to Hilary Wayland. The events that had led to the police coming to the Red House were as follows :

When the ill-news of young Darke being found dead in his own wood had flown apace from The Towers, and along the high-road from cottage to cottage, horror and speculation had naturally gathered most of the neighbours in a wondering crowd under the tree of the roadside inn.

Here Masters Freddie and Bobbie had also hurried, open-eared and open-mouthed ; allowing themselves to play truant from school with the important sense that, as the deceased had come very near being their brother-in-law, they could not possibly be expected to do anything that day beyond gathering greedily all the latest details, surmises, and wild reports, to which they added pompously their own quota of information.

They knew that Darke had had too much to drink yesterday : so their gardener told them when they

came back from school, and their father had given him an awful rowing about it, too. Then the gardener's boy from the Red House, who had followed his young master's example, chimed in with a highly-coloured report of the quarrel in the laboratory, of which he had caught sounds while hoeing the gravel-path; and he illustrated, by acting in his own person Dickie's tipsy gait, as Wayland had walked him off out of the garden and through the meadows to the wood.

By the time Eddie came up and collared his young brothers, as he expressed it, by literally inserting his fingers at the backs of their necks, turning both heroes round on a quick-march home, an impression, growing rapidly to a sensational rumour, was left behind in the little crowd, at which the Wayland schoolboys would have been astonished. No less than the corroborated report that a terrible quarrel had taken place yesterday between the dead man and his father-in-law to be; and that the latter himself had led the poor drunkard's steps to the wood, from which young Darke never emerged alive.

The police were not slow in hearing this; the sequel may be guessed.

It was Eddie who hastily roused his father on the arrival of the police at the Red House, and at the same time communicated to him the ill-news which had caused their visit.

When Wayland hastily dressed and came down to the study, the shock of the intelligence was plainly to be seen in his pale features and the bewildered state of his mind. He began to talk eagerly, volubly, supposing that the affair had been an accident, yet blaming himself for not having conducted Darke the whole way to The Towers. Had the doctor seen the corpse? He could say, of course, whether or not the dead man had fallen on the ground and so struck his temple. The inspector civilly intimated, with regret in his voice, that the doctor's verdict was different. Darke had been felled by a blow from an instrument, evidently his own loaded cane, which had been found lying beside him, the nature of the blow being such that he could not have delivered it himself.

“But I left him there by the seat in the wood,”

expostulated Hilary, frowning with a perplexed air. "He was alone when I left him. We had had a quarrel, I am grieved to say——"

The inspector interrupted him with a respectful warning against saying anything that might hereafter be used in evidence against him.

"Why, what do you mean?" burst in Eddie hotly.

Whereupon the man announced deprecatingly that it was their duty to arrest Mr. Wayland on suspicion of felony, and to take him before the nearest magistrate.

Wayland cheerfully and instantly assented.

"It is all right ; it will all come right ;" to which his friendly captors added their good wishes.

And then Eddie, half-outraged, half-lost in admiration of his father's benignant self-possession, declared :

"Well I will go with the governor to back him up."

CHAPTER XXI.

LORD ST. ERMINS was engaged in the pleasant occupation of smoking in a little conservatory, opening out of his library, while untwining, or rather attempting to untwine, high heaps of passion-flower tendrils that were apparently tangled in inextricable confusion. During the old bailiff's tenancy these had been suffered to spread at will over the walls, or fall in heaps on the ground. Randall had begun the task of taking the flower vagrants down this morning before disposing the whole to best advantage all over the walls and roof, promising himself that the place should be made into a green bower starred with pendent blossoms.

"If I get through this in a week, I shall be lucky," was his rueful meditation between cigar-whiffs, as he untwined and untwined, seated comfortably amidst the green, lithe creeper masses. Meanwhile

the news of young Darke's death was in his thoughts. An accident to a tipsy young fellow—that was all he had heard or knew. Vaguely he wondered whether his friend Wayland would be grieved for long, being in the secret of Hilary's distaste for the bridegroom-elect.

“Poor girl! I hope she did not care much for him,” was the next comment. “He did not look prepossessing to me; but, then, girls’ fancies are strange, and perhaps in this out-of-the-way place he may have seemed a young Beau Brummel and Cræsus combined in her eyes. If he had lived and gone on as he began, she would most likely have led a miserable life. Heigh-ho!” And somehow his thoughts thereupon strayed away, as they did a hundred times a day, towards the never-forgotten girl whom he had loved only a year ago and so strangely lost. “One ought not to judge,” he soliloquised: “I do not seem to myself a fellow much worth caring about, when I could not even keep the treasure I had found.”

The conservatory was like a summer parlour adjoining the house—not so much a conservatory

either as a square stone room with a glass roof and doors. Seated here tranquilly pursuing his peaceful task, its owner never heard fly-wheels on the gravel-sweep, and he looked up amazed when his morning's quiet was broken by a strange party of visitors entering at the far end of the library.

"What, Wayland, my dear fellow," called out St. Ermins with a slight regret in his heart at flinging down some passion flower arms that it had cost him two minutes at least to detach from a loving intertwining which they instantly resumed. Then coming forward—as he became aware of the presence of the policeman standing behind his friend—with quick sympathy, and a grave face befitting what he supposed to be the purport of this visit.

"I have heard the sad news of this poor young fellow's fatal accident, and feel for you all very much. Is there to be a coroner's inquest? But I see you have the police with you. How can I help you? In magisterial capacity, I suppose—I shall be so glad if I can do you any service."

"It will be a service, my dear St. Ermins, although momentarily disagreeable to you as my friend," said

Hilary Wayland with great gentleness of demeanour, and a rather sad smile. He pressed the hand St. Ermins had held out to him, holding it longer than usual: then added, "I am glad to have shaken hands with you to begin with, for when your present duties are over it depends upon yourself whether you will shake hands with me again. I am bound to say that on thinking matters calmly over in my own mind as we all drove here, evidence—that is to say circumstantial evidence—does seem very greatly against me." Then as St. Ermins looked at him with surprise and the rest still kept an awkward silence, "We are indeed unspeakably distressed over poor Richard Darke's sudden death," went on the suspected man with deep gravity, raising his candid blue eyes to his host's face with a serenity of expression that gave real beauty to his features, "and it may come as a still further surprise to you when you hear why I am brought here; but, my dear lord, pray put all private feelings aside as to our friendship that might pain you in doing what is clearly your duty. These good fellows here will explain."

Hereupon the inspector stepped forward, feeling that Wayland's manner, just tinged with solemnity, was that of a real gentleman under the circumstances ; although he had little doubt that his prisoner was guilty of manslaughter.

Randolph's first incredulous surprise changed, as the circumstances were gradually narrated, to troubled fears on his friend's score. He stood in a judicial position with his back to the empty fireplace ; the policeman on one side, Wayland in the middle, while in the background Eddie's eager boyish face kept looking intently from one to the other. As St. Ermins went on with his examination of the evidence offered by the policemen, upon which they ventured to arrest Wayland for felony, the faces of all present grew more gloomy and anxious, excepting that of Hilary himself.

It seemed that the servants at The Towers had not much troubled themselves about their master when he did not return to dinner. They supposed merely that he had met Miss Wayland and gone back to the Red House in her company. Therefore, believing *himself* relieved from official duties, the butler

strolled down to the inn that evening in a chance sort of way. There he met the Red House gardener, who let fall some cynical remarks on young Darke's state of intoxication that afternoon. Mr. Wayland had turned him out of the Red House garden with a flea in his ear.

Thereupon there was a vague uneasiness in The Towers household that night, and a footman sat up. For they supposed Dickie might have turned back to the St. Ermins hotel to finish his spree, and who could tell at what hour he would be driven home incapable, as several times before.

In the morning, two labourers going to their duties in Darke's farmyard saw the body in the wood. They ran to The Towers with the ill news. The nearest doctor was sent for—and by chance he happened to be passing a few minutes later after having been called up in the night to attend a labourer's wife who had just brought twins into the world. Seeing Darke had been dead some time no one had dared to move the body. The doctor declared that Dickie had died from a blow on his temple evidently delivered with his own loaded cane

that lay close by. Moreover, from the position of the latter and the direction of the blow he could not have inflicted it himself. Death had been instantaneous.

A strange thing was that the dead man's handkerchief was laid over his face and partly under his head, thus covering him. This was very extraordinary.

Also some letters in Darke's breast pocket were partly protruding, as if thrust back in haste after examination; and a large pocket-book containing other papers was unclasped. But the dead man's watch, rings, and studs were untouched, and a good deal of money was found upon his person.

Darker and darker thus grew the mass of statement arrayed against Wayland, to which, in spite of repeated warnings, he himself persisted in adding. He insisted on giving full details of his quarrel with the deceased in the laboratory, his own insulted feelings, and how he had supported Dickie's stumbling footsteps to the wood. In spite of Eddie's imploring looks, in spite of St. Ermins' hints, he *would* tell

it all out. The provocation he had received again lit up his large blue eyes, his face worked with indignant scorn on recalling Darke's threats when insisting for his money unless Wayland should force his daughter's inclinations. The past scene in the garden rose vividly before the imaginations of them all; the inference was damning.

An audible groan came from poor Eddie in the background, as he buried his head in his hands while half kneeling on a *prie-dieu* chair with his arm on its back. St. Ermins echoed the groan in his own heart, for he too felt, like the boy, a torturing doubt as to his old friend's innocence. Why could Wayland not say straight-out like a man, "Yes, I did it in my passion and I repent?" But it was human nature, after all, to try and save his own life by pleading not guilty. Most men would do it; but then—this man had seemed in such respects above other men.

With a faltering voice and downcast look St. Ermins began to speak the first words of that final duty he felt called upon by his conscience to fulfil—this was to remand the prisoner in custody until the

summer assizes, which were to be held the following week,—as there was, unhappily, too much presumptive evidence against Wayland to permit of his liberation.

CHAPTER XXII.

THE first few words; not more—

For what was that strange hoarse cry outside? Through the open French windows they could see across the sunlit garden; there a woman's figure was flying towards the house, past the square fish-ponds, through the stiff-patterned flower-beds, nearer, nearer. Her hasty steps pattered across the gravel; then she rushed in, stumbling on the threshold of the window from sheer exhaustion.

It was Rachel, with her brown hair half unbound and falling down her back; Rachel bareheaded—her pretty pink, cotton gown torn by brambles and stiles in that wild race hither—who, in her rich youth and beauty, was standing by her accused father's side.

She dropped at his feet now, clasping him with her arms—they hardly knew whether it was from

pure weakness or in agonised beseeching, as they noticed the wild heavings of her bosom and heard her panting breath.

“My darling, my darling, what is this? You have run all the way—you are worn out——” and Wayland raised her soothingly from the ground.

“*Rachel!*” burst from Randall Ingham’s lips. He stepped forward, his eyes staring, a great wonder and gladness almost overwhelming him. But no one heard or heeded; for Rachel had flung her arms about her father’s neck, and with her head buried on his shoulder was murmuring in imploring accents:

“Father, father, don’t think of me; think of mother, think of all the others—of the little children: what would they do without you? Do you hear? Do you understand? *Don’t think of me.*”

With one swift movement she tore herself from his embrace and almost blinded by fatigue and unshed tears, unable to distinguish anything clearly in the obscurity of the room, coming as she did out of the dazzling sunlight, but knowing by instinct that Lord St. Ermins the magistrate stood before her, she threw her head back and with extended clasped hands cried

out in a voice that pierced through her hearers' ears into their very souls.

"Take me, take me! I confess! I did it!"

"*You! You! You!*" seemed to buzz in her bewildered brain from all the voices around, in tones of indignant remonstrance and disbelief.

"I!" she cried, her voice rising higher than theirs all, "I alone did it. I ran out of the house and up to The Towers—you can ask the servants there, they saw me—I repented after I had sent Richard Darke away and that he quarrelled with my father, about money Richard had lent him—I resolved after all to marry him. He was not at home when I rang the bell.—Oh, you can all get evidence—then I followed him and found him in the wood where father left him, and—and—he spoke as if his money had bought me—he insulted—me—I mean, I was maddened, and then——"

She threw up her hands with a wild gesture, intimating that she had lost all power of self-control. In her agonised excitement the working of the beautiful girl's face had shown such powers of swift passion, such depths of emotion, the likeness to her

father in his angered moods was so apparent that not one of those who heard her doubted that some ungovernable impulse of outraged womanly feeling had nerved her hand to strike the fatal blow that had suddenly put out Darke's life.

"My God ! my poor child ! " came from Wayland's ashen lips in tones of such intense sorrow that even Eddie's boyish grief for his sister was arrested—he felt that compared with his father's anguish his own was as nothing.

Tears were running down the faces of the two policemen, strong men though they were.

" Rachel ! "

Once more that cry came from St. Ermins' lips ; but now low. A cry of love ; such love as forgives crime, outlives death, is stronger than aught else on earth or in Heaven.

Rachel looked up. She stared wildly before her, seeing once more the early grey hair, the kindly features of her first love. Three or four seconds they both so stood looking in each other's eyes, forgetting those around. Then Rachel wavered as she stood ; the remembrance of why she was here

and all the late circumstances crowded upon her brain, still reeling from this last shock. It proved too much. A sudden darkness came upon her senses, and she threw out her arms as if imploring aid from the man she still loved best, in this her second great extremity of peril.

“Randall,” she murmured, in tones that went to the hearts of all the spectators with great surprise. Somehow they felt these two were more to each other than any of the onlookers had guessed—how this had come about they neither knew nor could possibly imagine. But curiosity was so secondary a consideration at such a moment that they all accepted the fact without pausing at the time to wonder.

For Rachel had sunk fainting on the ground, and a merciful darkness enwrapped her mind.

CHAPTER XXIII.

Two momentous hours had passed by; two hot noontide hours that to happy people on this summer day would have gone like a dream. But to the little party at The Wilderness they had been full fraught with emotion, such as during a year, or even years of happier peaceful times might *never* be experienced.

As in a dream St. Ermins found himself supporting Hilary Wayland by the arm, and leading him back to the Red House along the same field path down which Rachel had come with flying feet, so lately. Their steps moved slowly, heavily, in contrast to that wild race of the impetuous girl. Wayland every now and then would stop, as though stupefied, and stare straight before him, unheeding, unseeing, till St. Ermins, gripping his shoulder,

would contrive to make him hear some words of rousing, as consolation was impossible.

Hilary Wayland seemed ten years older since morning; his shoulders were bent; there was a look of piteous anguish in his drawn and haggard features and in his staring eyes, while now and again a long quavering sigh would escape him as if he were ready to render up his very ghost. Or his friend could just hear the heart-broken murmur—

“My girl—my poor, poor girl!” Otherwise not a word.

“Is he going mad?” St. Ermins wondered dully to himself.

It said much for Randall's sympathy that while his soul was still reeling under the shock he had undergone, he yet found room in his heart to pity this miserable father. The agony of St. Ermins' feeling was nevertheless so much greater inasmuch as Rachel was all in all to him. She was the one love of his lonely life, who had seemed lost—whom he had mourned and searched for, hitherto in vain. When she had rushed into the library before his

startled vision in all her youth and loveliness, for a few brief seconds he had seemed caught up to the seventh heaven in a transport of bliss that blotted out all other considerations. And then the very height to which his mind had soared in that happy transport of joy, made the abyss to which his hopes were dashed seem all the deeper, more intensely awful.

And what of Rachel, as these two paced by the wooded stream-side?

She was gone, gone from the midst of those who loved her; had passed away before their very eyes, stepping resolutely into the ramshackle closed fly with Eddie and the two policemen, and by now the gates of the St. Ermins gaol would have closed upon their beautiful darling. O, it was maddening!

St. Ermins, as a magistrate, had urged with all his might that the young girl should be let out on bail. Her crime if, any, would be manslaughter, he vehemently declared. But to his surprise he found himself confronted by a strong opposition on the part of the police. The inspector respectfully but as earnestly held that the money owing

to Mr. Darke was at the bottom of the whole matter, and being an obstinate though kindly man, stuck to his ground that the lady's offence was a capital one. In the face of this vital difference of opinion on the part of the police, St. Ermins felt powerless to carry out his own wishes. His own friendship for the Wayland family and his agony at having to inflict the sentence of committal to prison upon the girl he loved with all his soul, were so evident to others, so overwhelming to himself, that Eddie whispered in a burst of generous sympathy.

"Do your duty, my lord. Rachel herself would be the first to tell you so."

"She would," retuned St. Ermins, with a white but sternly set face. "My very affection for your family makes it imperative on my honour to show no favour—even to her." He knew that to overcome the objection of the police it would be necessary to apply to a judge in Chambers to obtain bail; and that meanwhile the summer assizes would be held within the next few days. Wayland sat as if stunned throughout this colloquy, and took no share in it.

Rachel herself had been calmest of all around her on recovering from her fainting fit. The bailiff's sister, who now lived in the garden cottage of The Wilderness as a sort of informal housekeeper, had been called in haste when the girl had fallen senseless to the ground. The old woman had known Rachel from a child and was hard-headed, though kind of heart. On coming to, the poor girl had seemed to turn to her, while mechanically begging :

“Stay by me. I don't want to see the others—it only distresses me.”

Then with clearer returning senses the brave girl had risen, bound up her hair, and said with a calm that struck awe into the women about her that now she was ready. She knew, she said resolutely, that she must be taken to prison—why delay? Best go at once and have it over.

A sobbing maid went with her message and returned to say :

“Will you not see your father, Miss Wayland? Lord St. Ermins too, begs a few words——”

“Better not.” Rachel had replied, still with the

same stony calm. "I have told them all, there is nothing more to say. Ask father to go home—to think of mother and the children."

Again the old housekeeper urged her, judging that it would be better for the girl to break up this unnatural quietude.

Rachel sat silent. At last she murmured as if the words were wrung out of her by great pressure of suffering.

"No. Don't ask me. They may see me pass but not speak It is useless. My mind is made up. Only let Eddie come with me if he may."

And after that not another word passed her lips.

Randall, while the women of his household were attending to the fainting girl, was meanwhile pacing the library, feeling convulsed with the intensity of his grief. Wayland sat by in an arm-chair, or rather seemed flung down there in a limp heap, his head buried in his hands, the whole man, mind and body, seeming almost stricken to the ground.

"My child, my poor child," he groaned once or twice, "like me, like me—so hasty; but so gener-

ous," and each time the sorrowing father spoke a fresh outburst of low sobs shook poor Eddie in a corner, as he wept there freely as any girl. The poor boy hardly stirred, except to twist his wet handkerchief round and round, while tears washed down his generally rosy face. But when Rachel's message came he got up somewhat comforted; he could still do something for his sister; he was allowed to see the last of her.

"I will go with her myself," cried out Wayland; but when they told him this was against his daughter's wish the unhappy man shivered, and with all the fire died out of him, whispered pitifully as if to himself, "I understand; she does not wish to see me—not to see me."

Strange how utterly changed Wayland was. None would have ever believed that his fiery temper, the high spirit which always had made him ready hitherto to fight to the last against adverse circumstances, should have left him now, weak as a little child.

St. Ermins paced the room as has been said, while the women said it was best they alone should be

left with Miss Wayland. The man felt plunged in a hell of emotions; but outweighing and overshadowing all others pressed the one awful thought slowly down—like a terrible torture bed slowly crushing the victim that lay upon it:—*She has confessed*; she did this deed. There is no hope.

He did not trouble his mind now to ask how Bonnie Wayland could be one and the self-same person as his love, Rachel Smith. Time enough later on. He could only step forward, his teeth on edge, his muscles strained to sharp tension by the self-control to which he was subjecting himself, and press Rachel's limp hand for one quick moment as she passed through the hall, brave and with her head high; but quickly.

"Rachel," he murmured.

She turned and gave him one inscrutable look out of her lovely grey eyes; but she did not speak.

Wayland stumbled forward with a look of agony on his ashen face.

"My Rachel, God protect and comfort you."

He held out his arms, and those around sobbed as father and daughter embraced. Then Rachel

tore herself free, trembling slightly, and still without a word.

Then she was gone.

For half an hour afterwards Wayland was too overcome with grief to stir, and St. Ermins had to bestir himself to minister to his unfortunate friend. Now he was taking him back—home.

How strange home would be to them robbed of its one brightest inmate of all !

Both men as they went had their minds full of the same thought, of how impetuously Rachel must have rushed down this very path with flying feet. Every blade of grass seemed still to bear her impress ; every bush by the path might have brushed her dress. Nature alone had been witness of her generous agony of mind while, poor girl, she had been alone.

At the Red House some rumour had, perhaps mercifully, preceded them. The children were grouped waiting in the hall, and peering out awed from under the blinds, their father's face frightened them, and they burst out crying and crept away.

Marion came downstairs looking like a ghost.

"What has happened, father? What has Rachel said or supposed? I don't understand."

At that Wayland seemed to remember his other children, and going up took her in his arms, breaking the terrible news with the explanation that it must have been an accident—that Darke was tipsy, as they all knew, and, as Rachel said, she had been hasty. When the whole truth broke upon her, Marion was stunned for some minutes, and sank in a chair, leaning her head against her father's shoulder; suddenly she straightened herself and declared in a tone as if she had been considering the matter all the time in her own mind:

"It is not true—I do not believe Rachel."

"I tell you she says she did it," doggedly repeated Wayland.

Still Marion firmly reiterated with her lips compressed:

"I do *not* believe it; Bonnie might say so with her last breath—O my God! I don't mean that," and poor Marion turned ghastly white and trembled; "what I mean is, I know her nature too well; had she done it and known he was dead she would have

flown to the Towers to alarm everybody—she would have run here and told us all. No; no. She has some hidden reason for saying this. We do not know the truth.”

“Thank God you say so. I feel the same,” cried Randall with a great sigh of relief that was like gladness, “my poor dearest Rachel.”

Hilary looked up at his friend with a dull surprise; but Marion, with all a woman’s quickness of intuition, asked sharply,

“What is she to you, Lord St. Ermins? You look so strange. You never knew my sister before; or—did you?”

“I did indeed. I was on board the the *Oceana* during the shipwreck, when she was with Sir Horace and Lady Wayland. My name was Randall Ingham then.”

“Randall Ingham!” came from Marion’s lips with accusing scorn. “Yes; she told me all about you; you seemed to care for her, at least you said so; then you left her.”

Ingham hurriedly but fully explained the matter,

ending up with the eager question in self-exculpation:

"How could I know that Miss Smith was the same girl as your sister Bonnie Wayland, whom I never saw till to-day? But you, as she had confided in you, could you not have told that Randall Ingham and Lord St. Ermins were one and the same man?"

"No," pleaded poor Marion, attacked in her turn. "I only knew from some gossip in the neighbourhood that a grand-nephew had succeeded to the old lord. I supposed you were a Mr. Lupton, as that is the family name."

"True. I was Randall Lupton till some few years ago, when the name of Ingham was left me with a small fortune."

"I knew it: I knew you had been Randall Ingham, but we so seldom talk neighbours' gossip in my family, and I have spent so many hours in my laboratory, that I have not taken interest enough in what concerns my children's lives. Oh, what a coil of circumstances!"

Then Eddie came back; yet he had but little to

say in answer to the eager, sad questionings with which they crowded about him.

Bonnie had not spoken all the way to the St. Ermins gaol, only now and then she had pressed his hand or stroked his arm as if to cheer him ; and at the last she had turned and said quickly with a farewell kiss :

“Tell Marion to think of father—not to grieve for me. She must comfort poor Daddie——”

“And when—and when——?” the others asked with choking voices.

“In a week. The summer assizes, you know,” whispered Eddie, with choking voice, “that is what the governor told me at the gaol. No time for us to lose about the defence, he said.”

CHAPTER XXIV.

OF all the actors in our little drama, perhaps St. Ermins was most to be pitied that evening as he returned to The Wilderness with hasty steps. The Wayland family he had left behind at the Red House had each other to turn to. Hilary himself, Marion and Eddie, could at least share their mutual sorrow; there was some consolation perchance in telling each other how each one imagined the hasty deed had happened. All three kept repeating each other's very words unconsciously, as if every last idea were a new thought come to the speaker's self; they reminded each other of their poor Bonnie's generous but hot temper, her high spirit from a child. Oh, no doubt the unhappy dead man must in his tipsy state have insulted, even outraged her womanly feelings, already tried that afternoon by his previous conduct. He did not know what he

was about. He had presumed familiarly, no doubt, upon her overtures of reconciliation, and must have angered her greatly for her to strike quickly, never thinking how deadly was the weapon she must have snatched up.

"Yes, yes!" Eddie had sighed, for he was the principal speaker; how many times had he not seen some drunken boor of a fellow try to kiss a pretty girl against her will, while she in honest wrath would reply with a sound blow on the side of his head in self-defence. *That was how it must have happened!* So Eddie had repeated.

"And yet I cannot believe it," Marion would object obstinately under her breath, "I can never believe it. There is something more behind."


Their father sat by, still silent, again sunken in his chair, his head resting on his hand.

"For my sake—for my sake," escaped from his lips at intervals.

"He means that poor dear Bonnie only accepted Richard Darke because of the debt father owed him," Marion explained in undertones to Lord St. Ermins, and again to her brother.

Even on this first terrible evening the care of the sick, perhaps dying mother upstairs, the necessity of keeping up before the children to some extent, spread the sorrow to those elder ones over a wider field.

But St. Ermins, hurrying back to The Wilderness, felt now at moments as if he might go mad. Glancing back at the chain of recent events, he accused himself of being the cause of this terrible catastrophe to the woman he so deeply loved—the only being left on earth for him to love. If he had not sailed in such haste from Plymouth, taking for granted too easily that she was on board; if he had turned back from Madeira or even from the Cape, he might have better traced his vanished darling. Then Rachel would have been his wife by now. Wayland, his friend, need not perhaps have incurred his debt to young Darke. This brave girl's noble attempt at self-sacrifice for her father's sake had all come from her apparent desertion by the man who had won her girlish promise to be his wife. He, Randall, alone was to blame for her engagement of three miserable days; for her loathing renunciation of her churlish lover, then her despairing conviction that this would



be the ruin of her family, which had led to the last and fatal interview with Darke.

As he so thought, St. Ermins' steps reached his garden gate; he entered the library by the same window as Rachel; stood upon the spot of the Turkey carpet which her dear feet had pressed; then, though no longer youthful, though enthusiasm and sentiment one might have thought long fled with the passing years, he went down on both knees and kissed the ground. Rising up, he raised his right hand, and inwardly calling Heaven to be his witness, he vowed with solemn accents in a low quavering voice:

“Please God, I will yet save her young life from this awful punishment, if it can be done!” Then relieved by his own words he thought more quietly, “Why not? It must be compassed by the pleadings of the best counsel that money and influence can procure. She has youth, beauty, innocence, all in her favour; Heaven grant we may succeed. But *if not*, I dedicate the rest of my existence to her whose young life will have been buried in a living death, from which I might have saved her.”

Then, relieved by the action, he feverishly set at

once about making hasty preparations for a journey to London by the express train leaving the next hour. He snatched a light meal; wrote a few hurried words to Eddie :—

“ I am off to town and shall move heaven and earth to retain Williamson Montacute for our side. Meanwhile, collect every scrap of evidence in favour; remember—no time to be lost. Your father is too overwhelmed to be of use to us, but read this to your sister Marion, and tell her, on thinking it over since, I begin to believe she is right. *We do not know all the truth yet !* ”

For Marion's first argument, struck out with that sudden flash of woman's intuition, so unreasonable in men's opinions, yet at times incomprehensibly right, had taken hold of his mind, and like a little leaven was working through all his thoughts.

It *was* unlike an open-hearted, fearless girl not to run for aid even if succour were hopeless, had she known that her hand had killed her late lover. Surely she would have screamed aloud, would have wrung her hands, and rushed, with the same hot-

headed haste that winged her feet, to save her father from even temporary accusation. There was more behind, as Marion had impulsively declared. The question was : What was it?

CHAPTER XXV.

IT was almost a relief when the door of the cell closed, when the steps of the warder died outside in the passage, and Rachel found herself alone. Four white-washed walls, a narrow room, a high window through which the beams of the sinking sun just touched the ceiling. Utter solitude; utter quietness; yes, in a manner it was rest. No anxious thoughts now tormented her poor tired brain as to how her father might be shielded; no more agonising fears; no more weaving and unweaving of impossible plans.

It was all over. There was no more to be done. As she sat with tired body on the side of her little bed, Rachel did not even much think of Randall Ingham, the man who had so strangely reappeared before her eyes that day. What did it all matter now? "I am so fast set in prison that I cannot

get forth," echoed dully in her brain. What did love matter—what did friendship matter? A little time and she would never see all their faces again; and the gap would close in the family circle; year by year her memory grow fainter to the younger ones. But the home would not be broken up; their father would never be branded as a murderer, nor his grey hairs be shamed by an untimely death.

Only then her mother's pale drawn face came back to the girl's mind.

"She will miss me and will not understand," was the sad thought that recurred at intervals. Otherwise the feeling of self-sacrifice, the flush of having done an heroic deed, filled her heart with a warmth of satisfaction.

That night, while all those who loved her watched and wept, Rachel lay down upon her hard plank bed and slept the sound and undisturbed sleep of tired youth till dawn.

On the next day, however, the first one of her detention in gaol, the prisoner's fortitude began to be really tried. For Marion and Wayland had obtained permission from the governor of the gaol

to visit her. When Rachel was apprised of their visit she seemed greatly overcome and begged only to see her sister.

The governor consoled Hilary, who was his old friend.

"Most likely she feels overwhelmed at the idea of meeting you; no doubt she suffers keenly from thinking of the trouble she has brought upon her family. Women understand each other best; but in a day or two she will feel able to see you."

"Yes, yes; yes, yes;" sighed Wayland, "I can understand it only too well; but for me she would not be in this terrible situation. O my child, my unfortunate, generous child."

Meanwhile the coroner's inquest had been held at The Towers that morning. Wayland had been examined and had roused himself sufficiently from his stagnation of hopeless misery to simply repeat his former statement. No fresh facts had transpired.

"Poor father longs so to see you, dear, to give you his blessing," urged Marion, after she and Rachel had embraced and clung to each other, then had sat down side by side with hands locked together.

on Rachel's bed. A female warder had quietly entered behind the visitor, but she stayed as far removed as the cell permitted; and as there was no more expression on her visage than if she were a machine, she was no hindrance to the murmured conversation of the sisters.

"Oh, don't let him come; it will only distress us both," implored Rachel at once, with a sort of angry alarm that surprised her sister. "There is no more to say; he knows that."

"Still, dearest, you will be glad to know that he sends you his forgiveness," went on Marion, closely scrutinising her sister's features. "My poor dear, I know that he is under a great mistake: there is nothing to forgive when you never did the deed."

Rachel started violently. Till now she had seemed languid as a white flower half broken on its stalk and drooping, but at that all her heart's blood seemed to rush into her face, and drawing unconsciously back, she hurriedly asked—

"What do you mean, Marion? What—what do you mean, I say? Is this a time for riddles? You

don't seem to remember my declaration and where I am now."

"I mean I do not believe you—what you said," came in slow and emphatic answer. "You have some secret motive. O Bonnie, O my dearest, tell me what it is. Can you not confide in me?"

She put her arms about her sister in tenderest beseeching, looking so lovingly, imploringly, in Rachel's face that she could not believe her yearning appeal would be heard in vain. Were they not sisters—flesh of each other's flesh, of the same blood with like thoughts, upbringing, family affections? But she did not succeed.

Rachel writhed half away from her. With rounded shoulders and a sullen look on the beautiful features, she tried to avert from that affectionate gaze.

In her heart the unhappy captive was secretly wroth with Marion, all the more that the latter's loving words and embraces melted her heart. O how she longed—Marion could not guess how she longed for some one to confide in: to be able to lay her heavy head upon that dear shoulder, and sob out

all the terrible sorrow that lay like a lump of lead on her heart ; thoughts that pressed like a band of iron about her brain. But no, no ! she must not spoil all now by weakness. And she trembled within herself, greatly fearing lest, in indiscreet zeal, Marion might stumble on the true secret which would wreck still more the happiness of all the dear ones at the Red House.

With frowning brows and in a constrained voice she forced herself to the mere words :

“Is that all you have to tell me? Believe me or not as you please. The jury will!”

Poor Marion with difficulty restrained a cry of anguish. In vain she pleaded, expostulated, laid all her fears and suspicions in full array.

“ You could not have done it, Bonnie ; you would have hastened to tell some of us. We all say you would,” she repeated again and again. But it was with useless reiteration.

Then came a knock at the door. Time was up. And more heavy-hearted even than she came, poor Marion had to take leave of her younger sister, whom she loved in truth better than herself, and went to

join her father, the faint flickering hope in her heart now almost extinguished. And this was the sixth day before the summer assizes would be held at St. Ermins.

CHAPTER XXVI.

THE fifth day before the dreaded trial had now come.

Alas, the inmates of the Red House grew only more dispirited as each sunny hour passed by. St. Ermins had returned from London, and now spent every moment of his time with the Wayland family. He had vainly hoped that during his brief absence Eddie's exertions might have found some clue to prove Rachel's full or partial innocence, in which he himself still believed.

But the boy met him with a dejected air telling its own tale. St. Ermins had sent in haste for a detective to aid the efforts, but both had only found Rachel's story corroborated in every detail.

The old gardener at the Red House who had seen her hasten up the road to the Towers as he stood at

the stable yard gate, said with an oath, rubbing the back of an earth-stained hand across his eyes :

“D— it all, Master Eddie, why did Miss Bonnie tell? I would have sworn an *allyby* for her, I would! yes, if it had blistered my tongue, To think of her, the brightest young lady ever my eyes were laid on, forced to stand her trial for that drunken sot! Oh, it’s maddening!”

It was! but what help for it? On this fifth day St. Ermins craved and obtained permission to visit the girl he loved in prison, in company with Eddie, her brother.

Rachel did not refuse to see them. On the contrary, a strong wish to see St. Ermins once more, if for the last time, had been gnawing in her mind ever since she had recognised him at The Wilderness. Curiosity is always a strong passion in a woman’s mind, and her love for St. Ermins, the first fresh romance of her young existence, filled poor Bonnie’s mind with returning force now, almost to the exclusion at times of thoughts of her own family and pity for her father.

She did not think of herself or her own situation

much. She only longed yet dared not pray that what she had done she might abide by without self-betrayal. To her the week before the trial was only protracted torture; she had no hope to save herself—none. Already this young creature looked death in the face dully, not bravely it seemed to herself, but as something inevitable against which there was no use crying out.

But to see Randall face to face revived youth's passionate desire within her. To know why he had left her, whether he still loved her. If he did, then poor child she fancied she could die happy.

This day the visitors being gentlemen, they were shown into a room in the gaol used for such purposes as this meeting. Here Rachel already awaited them in company of the impassive female warder, who as usual removed her presence as far as the limits of the middling-sized room permitted. Then while perfectly able to hear and watch what passed, she occupied herself apparently with a half-knitted stocking.

Randall's heart beat tumultuously as he and Eddie found themselves in the presence of the pris-

oner. St. Ermins was very pale though his eyes were eager. Rachel herself appeared white as a spirit to the loving, half-fearful glances both bent upon her. In truth she was very weary and heavy-eyed, for she had slept ill the night before after Marion's visit.

Her first hasty movement was to fling her arms round Eddie's neck and kiss his fresh cheeks eagerly; then she turned and slowly held out her hand to Randall with a patient, inquiring look that smote him to the heart.

"You left me at Plymouth," was all that came from her lips, but not as in reproach. What mattered aught now?

Randall bit his lip hard and held her hand within both his tight and close, and only kept looking in her eyes, that she might surely read in his very soul how blameless in intention he had been.

"What must you think of me?" burst from him at last with force. Then as a conscious warmth slowly stole into Rachel's cheek under the great love in his gaze, and a faint light again began to brighten her sweet grey eyes that swam in a gentle moisture of relieving tears, he went on only just keeping his

greater emotion in cheek. "Unthink it all, my dearest. My own Rachel—for I can see in your dear face you are that yet, in spite of the stars in their courses having fought against us two coming together. Believe me, you have never for a single hour—I may say for a single moment—been absent from my thoughts. I swear it. Your brother here, who is like a brother to me now, will bear me witness that I have explained all the terrible mistake to the satisfaction of your family."

"It was not his fault," put in Eddie gruffly, standing with his back turned to both while he stared up hard at the window, feeling himself horribly in the lovers' way. "Uncle Horace muffed the whole business by telling St. Ermins you were going on board the second steamer; so he sailed; and since he got home he has been searching for you as Miss Smith through every parish in the kingdom."

"Yes, I have tried day and night, and unceasingly I may say, to find you," struck in Randall, his explanation thus put in a nutshell by his young companion.

Then he briefly recounted all that had happened

since he and Rachel parted, eagerly, rapidly, his heart in his voice; for time was precious.

"I see, it was my mistake in not being quite frank. But once when I did think of telling you my real name, it struck me that Aunt Honoria had asked me to promise not to do so, and that she would be pleased if I kept my word. Then I knew that Uncle Horace would explain that I was their niece whenever you told him that it was your wish to marry me. So I thought it would be a pleasant surprise," answered Bonnie dreamily.

Once more she and Randall looked deep in each other's eyes, reading each other's souls; all understood. Then St. Ermins opened his arms imploringly, Rachel drew nearer and she felt herself strained to his heart in a first, perhaps well-nigh a last, embrace on earth.

"At least now we will never be parted any more in mind," came slowly from Randall's lips, as now he held his love a little away from him, his eyes greedily, despairingly, taking note once more of the beautiful features he had never forgotten.

Alas! what cruel ravages her late trouble had

set on that lovely face, with its velvet complexion and sweet eyes that had haunted him this many a day and night. The look of buoyancy and joyous carelessness had vanished; the frank expression of the grey eyes had changed, for now they seemed looking inward, as if drawn by some dreadful image stamped in her memory.

But his voice all the more resolute with determination, he went on hurriedly :

“My darling, while we two live on earth you will feel we belong to each other now. You will know I am thinking only of you, suffering even more than you, while imaging my Rachel, my dearest one, cooped within these stone walls.”

The man's face was flushed and eager with passionate love, while Rachel sadly smiled at him, tranquil and pale, as if youth and human feelings were already dying out of her.

“Yes, I am much afraid that you will suffer—you and all the other dear ones; but don't fret. Remember always I am feeling quite brave and really happy in mind. My sin, if it was a sin, will be forgiven! Oh, I do believe that!” Then she went

on, a little quaver in her voice, the more piteous that she was trying hard to speak in loving consolation : “ It—it does not hurt much to be hanged, I believe ? It is more the *idea* that is dreadful, is it not ? And if—perhaps you could be just allowed to be near me at the last and hold my hand until the time comes ” (her voice sank to a whisper), “ I believe I should not be frightened ; you know you did when we were both so nearly drowned, and death had no terror for me then——”

A strange sound from Eddie interrupted his sister. The young fellow had withdrawn near the warder, and as far as the narrow limits of the room would permit, from a feeling of delicacy towards those two who were so much to each other. But he could not help hearing every word that passed, and now his feelings found vent in a sort of suppressed howl. The female warder was knitting furiously but dropping her stitches owing to a blurred vision from which her keen eyesight did not generally suffer. St. Ermins even more felt frenzied by this dreadful calm of resignation.

“ Rachel, Rachel,” he cried out, “ do not torture

us by such a thought; you may be condemned to prison—Heaven help us—for some, perhaps many, years, of your young life” (he could not bring himself to utter the terrible words “penal servitude”), “but surely any jury would recommend you to mercy; no judge would be hard-hearted enough to give the worst sentence. No, no.”

“Is that true? Are you sure? Do they say so? Are you *quite* sure?”

The words burst from poor Rachel’s lips rapidly, while a great joy and relief dawned and spread over her face. Then she sat down trembling for the first time, while the tension on her nerves visibly relaxed.

“Of course. What! could any twelve men find a girl like you guilty of deliberate intention? If it had been a man! Your youth, innocence, your looks will plead for you. All is in your favour.”

“*A girl like me.* Yes,” murmured Rachel, deep in thought.

“We are trying our best, my dearest girl; but oh, help us all you can in the task,” implored St Ermins. “Do make up your mind to tell us all the details, everything that happened, however painful to you,

without drawback. There may be some point that has never struck you which will prove that only some hasty, ungovernable impulse, perhaps a righteous womanly one, nerved your hand. Tell us the details."

"No, no," hoarsely answered Rachel, shrinking into herself as it seemed, and hiding her face with her hands. "You don't understand, I can never explain, whatever happens. Oh, let me be in peace."

In vain Eddie tried his best, backing up St. Ermins' beseeching appeal. The boy remonstrated, reasoned, but Rachel only sat dumb as if terrified, her face set.

Then St Ermins sat down beside her, softly slipping his arm about her shoulders, bending his head nearer hers.

"Only tell me one little thing," he softly pleaded in her ear, feeling that she quivered responsive to his loving caress—"only explain to us about the handkerchief. Why did you lay it so carefully over his face? You had some object?"

"Over his face! There was no handkerchief over his face. None, when I left him. Why, I remember seeing a fly——"

Suddenly recollecting herself, Rachel seemed to freeze into a statue, compressing her lips tightly. Then the little horse-shoe frown, both knew only came upon her face in moments of great tribulation of mind, was deeply stamped on her brows. Resolutely she detached herself from St. Ermins' arms.

"But the purse? At least you opened that? Perhaps there was some letter, some little note of yours written during your engagement——"

"What do you mean?" scornfully flashed out the girl, her pent-up emotion seeming to find some relief in turning upon them both. "Do you imagine that I would rifle a dead man's pockets? Oh, be silent. Leave me in peace."

And that was all either of them could extract.

"Only think, you are cutting the ground from under your own feet. You want to come back to us all?" urged Eddie, flinging himself down on the ground beside his sister and rolling his young head round in her lap in an agony of grief. Bonnie looked down at him with a strange smile and stroked his locks with her long white fingers.

"Don't you want to come back to us?"

"If you would only put us on the track to plead some extenuating circumstances, you would be free all the quicker, my darling," put in St. Ermins, his voice broken with emotion, as, unable to restrain himself much more, he stood upright, the very image of an almost broken-hearted, yet resolute lover. "Think that you are young—that you may yet enjoy life after ten—fifteen, or even twenty years are past. But however long it may be you will find me waiting when you come out of prison to make you my wife—that is," with a dreary smile, "if you do not think me too old; if you will still have me."

"Don't, don't! Oh, you will break my heart with your goodness; you are killing me with kindness, all of you."

At that Rachel fairly broke down, and while Eddie clung about her she rocked herself to and fro, sobbing her heart out.

St Ermins looked at them enviously. Tears relieved these two young creatures. "God give me tears," was in his mind; for his eye-balls were like two hot coals in his head, and there was a fire in his brain that no relieving grief could quench.

And no word more could they extract from Rachel.

There came a knock at the door. The time of their visit was already more than spent.

"I am better now," came from Rachel with some last sobs as she tried to smile at them. "Give my love to all at home and to Daddie—dear old Daddie—especially; give him my dear love, and say I am not at all afraid, that I am quite happy."

So the two men left her and drove away in St. Ermins' brougham, silent, with bowed heads. But after ten minutes St. Ermins, rousing, said in low earnest tones to his companion:

"Eddie, there is more in that handkerchief business than any of us have yet guessed. Did you notice she did not put it over his face?"

"Then who did?"

"Heaven only knows; but that is what we have got to find out. And did you notice she said there was a fly? Flies do not settle just at once on dead men's faces."

"I see; and yet by all accounts she did not stop

long in the wood," whispered back Eddie with a little gasp.

"Then there was a purse. Who disturbed those letters in his pocket?" Eddie could not answer that, yet no one could say whether anything was missing. "The dead man might have himself pulled the letters out of it and stuffed them back in such disorder."

"It isn't likely; he was always such a careful fellow," was all the light Eddie could throw upon that point.

When they were gone away, Rachel once more in her little cell wept long to herself with the self-pity of youth.

What a happy, safe and wedded life might hers have been by now with St. Ermins, had all things gone well. She felt like Jephthah's daughter, the fair Hebrew girl who, for her father's sake, bewailed her youth and lost lover on the mountains, and then came home to lay down her life.

At moments an outcry against her father rose in her young breast. Oh, she had done it gladly, willingly, yet how *could* he accept the sacrifice? She

would have been in despair had he not done so, but to be so ready had lowered in her estimation the parent whom she had thought best and wisest of living men. But it was only for three breaths; then she recovered herself.

“ He would far rather die—he would give worlds to be in my place,” she assured herself, “ but he feels that he must not do it, that for the sake of mother and the little ones he dare not do what he most wishes.”

CHAPTER XXVII.

For two days, as has been said, Wayland remained sunk in a stupor of dejection as if paralysed in mind. The terrible situation of his favourite child was a shock that seemed to have thrown the mental machinery of the man out of gear. This ardent disciple of science, who had scornfully renounced worldly vanities a quarter of a century ago, and ever since led a sequestered life "far from the madding crowd," toiling as a pioneer for the advancement of human knowledge, depriving himself and his family through long years of luxuries and pleasures with willing patience and stern perseverance—this man now accused himself bitterly as a wrong-doer. Loving to wife and children. Yes! he had been that. Still his whole days, and many nights, his best thoughts had been devoted to his work. His

boys had been sent to school ; they had struggled for themselves, as he held boys should do. But his daughters ! Ah, the scales had fallen now from Hilary Wayland's eyes. While he had been living upon his steadily decreasing capital, buoyed up with hope like any fanatic (and fanatics, he held, are the St. John Baptists of science as of religion, but they should not be married ones), his young daughters had patiently borne the yoke in their youth, taking upon themselves the cares of their sick mother, and of all the younger children, besides fulfilling many of his own duties, and ministering to himself with silent heroic resignation.

Under such a damning self-accusation Wayland could not be comforted. For these two past days he had sat mostly idle in his laboratory amongst the litter of his last vain experiment. He neither ate nor slept, but brooded for hours with bowed head. In vain Marion attempted to rouse him ; he only seemed dazed and answered in monosyllables. But at times there would break from his lips the low cry of exceeding bitterness :

“ Would to God I could have died for her, before

it came to this. O Rachel, my child, my child!"

It was King David's wail over his son. To how many in affliction has not the Psalmist given expression for their woe!

On the evening of the second day, as Wayland again sat there in his misery, he groaned and so spoke.

The window into the garden being open, a rough voice answered from outside:

"She ran fit to kill herself, sir, to spare you. Be a man! rouse up and do your best for her!"

In the silence of the summer evening the voice touched some superstitious chord in Wayland's disordered brain.

Marion and St. Ermins had in vain appealed to him. He had only turned a vacant eye on his interlocutors. But now he sprang up with eager trembling, opened the door, and demanded in startled, faltering tones—

"Who are you? What do you want with me? What do you want me to do?"

The old gardener was stolidly digging the beds round the house walls. He paused, looked his master

steadily in the face, and crossing his arms on his spade, uttered emphatically :

“If I was father of a gell like yours, sir—no offence!—I’ll be d—d if I’d sit in the house all day like an Irishwoman at a wake, mourning before even Miss Rachel is ever tried. Why, you are doing your best to get her hanged, you are! For if her own father goes and believes she meant to kill young Darke, some fools among the jury may do so too. There! I have said my say, as man to man, and if you want to discharge me on the spot I’ll not ask for my week’s wages.”

“Go on. *What* would you do in my place?”

“If I could get on that there jury to serve, I’d eat first the biggest meal ever I had in my life, and I’d put a bottle of spirits in my pocket with a hunch of bread and cheese,” went on the gardener with a meditative air. “Then when we had retired together I would tell the eleven others the verdict should be ‘serve him right,’ and I would stick to it till I had starved them into it. There was a man once who did that and was bashed by the others till he was black and blue with bruises. But that was not a

case of life and death. No, they would come round to my way of thinking."

Whereupon Adam's successor spat into his hands and resumed his digging under the study window.

Wayland straightened himself, drew a long breath, and walked direct into the house, a changed man. He asked for a glass of wine; drank two; and astonished St. Ermins twenty minutes later by walking as with seven-league boots up The Wilderness approach.

Randall was just then conferring with the eminent solicitor whose services he had engaged, while two detectives were in the background.

"I am my own man again. Tell me all you are doing!" said Wayland wringing his friend's hand.

Then he entered into the details of the matter with a quickness and lucidity of perception that impressed them all.

Meanwhile Marion had fairly felt distracted. Perhaps, poor girl, she was in reality happier that her mind was forcibly detached from the misery of continual thinking of her sister.

Mrs. Wayland was only a lesser anxiety. The

poor invalid had not rallied as usual from her last attack. She could not swallow much nourishment, and therefore how long she might last unless things mended was a question of pressing anxiety.

But she had now recovered her voice sufficiently to keep moaning for Rachel in an agonising way.

"Bonnie! where is Bonnie? I want Bonnie!" she kept repeating over and over again in plaintive undertones that fretted the nerves of her hearers almost past endurance.

Marion listened tearlessly, then, while moistening the poor parched lips by help of a feather dipped in milk and water, went on for her part repeating with forced cheerful calm the reiterated fibs.

That Rachel had only gone for a few days: she was on a visit: she would soon come back again.

"Bring her back . . . I want to see her . . . want to see her," entreated the poor mother.

The children too, were sick-looking and depressed. They left their bread and milk half eaten, and tormented each other's little hearts with fears and awful presentiments about Bonnie, although every one tried to hide the truth from them. The

boys begged to be allowed to stay away from school, and Marion had no heart to send them. For a bully schoolfellow meeting them along the road on the evening after Rachel's departure to gaol had insulted them by calling their sister a murderess. Hereupon Bobbie, though the smaller and younger, had thrashed him after a hard fight, and crept home himself with a face bulged in unexpected places almost beyond recognition—a frightfully swollen nose, and no eyes to speak of.

Through all these hourly lesser miseries Marion had, however, one steady ally and counsellor—Nurse Gibson. The woman was indefatigable and anxious as if one of the family herself. She took upon herself the duties of a housekeeper: saw to the tradespeople, ordered meals, told the young maids to do their work and not stand gossiping together in frightened whispers. Also she heard the little girls their lessons and set them tasks, besides nursing Mrs. Wayland with even more care than ever. Best of all, she firmly and repeatedly declared to Marion that “no doubt the jury would set Miss Rachel free.”

And the fearful listener, wishing to believe her, was insensibly cheered though not entirely convinced.

"You are a real friend to us all. What should I do without you?" gratefully declared Marion several times a day.

"Don't thank me, Miss Wayland, I don't like it. Even if I do my best, God knows it is little enough," was the somewhat grim answer. For Gibson was a woman of upright, resolute ways, not given to sentiment. She was hard, even stern in many ways, but for her surface love of brightness and a little amusement when compatible with her sick-room duties.

"She is my sheet anchor," thought Marion.

But on the fourth day after Rachel left them came a shock to this good opinion. On going noiselessly into her mother's sitting-room Marion heard the usual moaning laments from the bedroom, but in shriller more piercing accents than usual. Mrs. Wayland was now bed-ridden, and the door being open into the inner room, the crying railings were distinctly audible.

She kept asking Nurse Gibson :

“What have you done with Rachel? . . . I want Rachel. . . . Where did you send my child?”

“*Be quiet. Hold your tongue this instant,*” came in almost savage tones that Marion with a great start recognised as those of the kindly nurse.

“My Rachel—what did you do to her?”

“Hush! I cannot stand this any longer. Be silent or”—the listener held her breath as she waited behind the half-open door—“or you will vex poor dear Miss Marion,” followed in reproachful diminuendo accents.

The storm was smoothing down with suspicious alacrity. Marion, guessing her vicinity was known, quietly entered the bedroom. As she did so her eyes fell upon a mirror opposite, and she sharply noticed that the chair by which she had so lately stood was reflected therein, although itself on one side of the half-open door. Any one may have noticed how a mirror reflects more of a room than what is directly opposite. Children will peer into a big glass and try which can see furthest “round the

corner," as they say. No doubt she had thus betrayed herself.

"Send this woman away. She is bad. I do not like her," feebly whispered the sick mother as Marion bent over her.

"Yes, dear, yes." And then in a backward whisper to Gibson, Marion explained, apologetically, "She is fussing herself again, I see. Shall I stay with her, if you like to go out for a little walk?"

"I don't mind if I do, for it's hard at times to keep one's temper, being human. And I was cross just now, which I'm sorry for," was the somewhat sullen answer. "I've got my feelings like other people, and to hear that constant cry for the one that I cared for most in this house just vexes me to the heart so that I would be glad to scream."

So saying, Gibson walked to the door, then turned sharply and came back again.

"Don't fret, Miss Wayland! It will all come right. It *must* come right," she whispered energetically, with a strange expression in her eyes. Then noticing that Marion shrank a little as if startled, she hurriedly added, "Don't mind me. I am feeling a

little queer through not sleeping at nights. I am too anxious to sleep, that's the truth. I keep thinking of my poor young lady and all the family; that's it."

Then she went out.

Strange. For Marion had each night taken the first watch in sitting up with her mother; that is to say, until half-past three in the morning, and each time on going to waken Nurse Gibson to take the second watch, she had been obliged to shake her by the shoulder, Gibson was sleeping so strangely sound.

"Can she be a hypocrite, I wonder?" sighed Marion Wayland within herself. Alas! her heart told her what might be the true cause of Gibson's outward show of sympathy and anxiety. Looking down upon her mother's wasted form, Marion knew that the nurse's duties would not last much longer. It was, she had heard, a truism that even the best of nurses weary of a protracted illness, will grow impatient, if their invalid hangs on, instead of recovering or dying within a reasonable time.

Was Gibson, too, a human vulture waiting to claim

her perquisites? Was she making the sordid calculation that her extra zeal and good services towards Marion might result in gifts of more clothes and a better gown or two from the invalid's wardrobe when no longer needed.

CHAPTER XXVIII.

THE gardener at the Red House was an individual of strong opinions. He held a man need not see much further than the length of his outstretched hand to do his duty. Plants must be watered in dry weather, walks hoed, green-house windows opened and shut, whether folk about him lived or died. Leastways, that was what *he* had got to do. Therefore, on the morning after he had dug the flower border round the Red House walls, he was trudging through the garden about seven o'clock busying himself with cucumber frames and so forth. His breast was still elated with a pleasurable satisfaction at having up and spoken his mind to Squire Wayland (as he liked to call his master) on the evening before. He had slept better since that than for the three previous nights, so he told his wife.

Suddenly the good man's eyes fell upon his freshly-dug border and a frown of displeasure followed.

“Drat those childer!” he muttered, for there were marks of feet in the mould under the study window. “When the garden door is open every night until ten o’clock or later, what call have any of them to be getting out this way?” he indignantly asked himself. Then, examining the tracks closer, he noticed the imprint of naked toes, and scratched his head thoughtfully. “What’s been up? There’s been some queer lark in this! . Could it be some of those young maids? No; they are too tender-skinned to hurt their feet. It’s them blessed imps of schoolboys! But Lor’! there’s no more mischief left in them now than meat in an eggshell when it’s empty!”

Home went the good man at eight o’clock to his breakfast, wondering. His house was one of the cottages clustered near the inn at the corner of the road close by.

“Pretty goings on up at our place,” he grumbled, telling his wife of the strange incident, “when there is death in the house, as one may say; for the mistress won’t last long, not to speak of that poor young soul in gaol. It is a disgrace for those servants to be

galivanting abroad at night, that's my opinion."

His wife was bursting, however, with some more highly spiced news which a neighbour had just been in to impart, with breathless but delighted horror.

Whatever was it?

Why, young Darke's ghost had been seen last night. Yes, indeed, as true as gospel! Two men who lived beyond The Towers demesne were crossing the water meadow last night between one and two o'clock, when what should they see but a white spectre come gliding out of the wood where the poor young fellow was found dead. The length of the meadow was between this fearsome thing and themselves, so, though terrified, both men stayed under the shadow of the hedge and watched. It went down the path by the stream to Squire Wayland's garden gate, and the gate clicked just as it would for any Christian passing through, though both men would take their solemn oath that it was a ghost, and that they could, so to say, see through it. And it was moaning like a lost soul and crying fit to break your heart. It went straight up the garden, while the two men peeped trembling, ready

to make a rush if necessary. Then it had suddenly vanished. Yet a few moments before, as they ran, one man was ready to swear he had still seen it in the moonlight looking up at the house and wringing its hands.

The gardener growled over this tale, because the wonder of it had made his wife late and careless over his breakfast. But afterwards, finding the little group of neighbours listening in gaping concourse to the two men, he likewise lent his ear and became partially converted.

The men had most likely been night-poaching! No matter; their account of the ghost was circumstantial, though their explanation as to the cause of their midnight stroll seemed less trustworthy.

The gardener heard the tale thrice told, with the same opinions thereon bandied from mouth to mouth and went back to his morning's work with a puzzled brain.

At this very same early hour an even more mysterious and thrilling incident agitated all the servants at the Red House. The housemaid, on passing through the hall to pull up the drawing-room blinds

and begin her dusting, was taken suddenly so bad at the sight of something that she had to sit down almost in a faint on a chair. And what she saw was—the print of two bloody bare feet on the stone floor. In spite of fainting she promptly fled to the kitchen, holding her side and gasping in a highly impressive manner.

Soon a little group was gathered awe-struck in the hall examining those horrid marks on the black and white stone floor. The little girls too, who had overheard the news in their nursery, were peering over the banisters half-dressed and wide-eyed.

On closer examination, with whispered awe, the footsteps were traceable across the hall and upstairs. None of the women hesitated as to whose they were. They were the steps of the murdered man without the shadow of a doubt.

Presently the news filtered to Nurse Gibson's ears, who came down and sharply scolded the timid crew. She would have no such nonsense repeated to vex Miss Wayland, that she wouldn't. And in virtue of her self-assumed place as housekeeper these

days, she ordered the cook, whose duty it was to clean the hall, to wash out those marks directly ; remarking that perhaps Master Freddie or Bobbie might have paid a visit to the larder in the night and cut their poor feet for their greediness. None of the maids believed her. Besides, blood will not out, as all the world knows ; and so, in spite of the cook's attempted scrubbing and hot water pail, the dark stains remained, to the servants' secret satisfaction.

Now Hilary Wayland with Eddie had slept at The Wilderness this past night in order to hold conference late and early with St. Ermins and their solicitors. Father and son only returned late on the following evening to the Red House ; St. Ermins also accompanied them. It was on this same day that Marion had been startled by Nurse Gibson's harsh impatience with poor Mrs. Wayland upstairs. Marion therefore stayed with her mother nearly all day, seeing that the latter's flame of life was flickering lower and lower.

When at supper time the weary girl came downstairs the three men of the party were still consult-

ing together outside in the laboratory and had not heard the bell.

"Connie dear, run and call father as usual," desired the elder sister of the younger one.

Little Constance crept slowly out. But a minute later there came a burst of sobbing from the garden door.

Marion found the child cowering there, as if terrified.

"Oh, I can't help it, please, Marion; but it's so dark in the garden," howled the little one.

"Well, you always go every other night, dear. Why, what is the matter?"

"She is afraid of the ghost," explained Ethel, with a burst of kindred grief.

Then with gurgling sobs the morning's tale was told.

"How could the servants frighten you with such wicked fibs?" said Marion severely. "Now, don't be such timid little mice. Depend upon it, it is only some stupid joke. Bobbie, you go and call father."

Bobbie did so, but himself darted past some dark

bushes with quite suspicious alacrity, which did not tend to dispel Marion's annoyance. Unfortunately being a real believer herself in ghosts, she could not assure her little sisters no such beings existed. Her prompt inquiries of the cook, who was oldest and wisest of the maids, only added another pucker to poor Marion's forehead, which, when she wrinkled it in anxiety, was ribbed like the sea sand after an ebbing tide.

She sent the children early to bed after supper, then confided this new trouble to St Ermins.

"I don't want to trouble father more," she explained, "and it is such a comfort to have a friend like you to ask advice of. Do you think it is some trick? If the country people bruit the noise that poor Richard's ghost comes to reproach us, might it not be worse for our poor darling? Public sympathy or prejudice counts for a good deal, does it not, in the minds of the jury?"

She put her query with fresh anxiety, lifting weary dark eyes seeking consolation in Randall's own anxious, pale, but always kindly face.

Poor Marion ! her eyes were her only beauty ; but

they were already disfigured by swollen lids, early crow's feet, and dark circles. A gush of pity rose in St. Ermins' heart for this sorely-tried young woman, and he placed a kindly hand on her shoulder that seemed rounded with weight of care.


"Let us look for ourselves," he advised. "Where is Eddie? Let us tell him. Perhaps he can find out if Freddie or Bobbie are to blame."

So they two examined the brown stains in the hall by the light of a bedroom candle. Here Eddie found them, having been called out to a secret conference with the gardener, who had hung about all the evening to have a word with his young master concerning the marks under the study window.

"Why, these are the very same prints as in the flower border!" declared Eddie eagerly, fully sharing Marion's uneasiness, which St. Ermins also did not consider misplaced.

For a few minutes they consulted together.

"The footprints outside the window leave the house as well as return, yet who would go out barefooted?"



"This is like the mark of a woman's foot, small and slender."

"Can it be the boys? That is what Nurse Gibson thinks."

If there is any truth in a schoolboy's word of honour, however, neither Freddie nor Bobbie had stirred from their beds last night. Eddie himself went up to question them, with a full offer of forgiveness, while explaining that possible evil consequences might come to their poor sister Rachel from any foolish pranks unconfessed, while at least a bad name would attach to all the family in the neighbourhood were Darke's ghost supposed to haunt the Red House.

In their night shirts both boys looked as saintly as a pair of choristers, while with sobs they assured their elder brother of their innocence.

"Who knows? there may be something in it. Let one of us sit up to-night with a dark lantern and watch," suggested St. Ermins.

None of them could have told what they suspected, yet all believed that Rachel was still keeping back some knowledge from them. It was just pos-

sible that some one of the servants might hold some clue to this. In any case, if the culprit was a maid, she was a courageous girl to go alone to the wood which was already invested with superstitious terrors.

Eddie volunteered to pass the night in the laboratory, keeping the door open, through which he had a clear view of the grass plot and flower beds directly under the house. But though the poor boy sat there alone and wakeful in the summer darkness until dawn came and relieved him of his weary vigil, no ghost came up the garden path that night.

Then Marion stole out shivering to whisper that she would give him an early cup of tea brewed over an Etna in her mother's dressing-room. For Nurse Gibson had insisted on taking the first nursing watch that night till four in the morning, because, as she said, Miss Wayland was quite worn out. Marion did not call her brother, therefore, till the nurse had gone to lie down, for all had agreed that it was best that no one beyond their immediate selves should know of the look-out that was being kept.

And so the third day dawned before the dreaded

assizes, and hopelessness was in the hearts of all those at the Red House. In vain the solicitors tried subtly to question Rachel; in vain the chaplain of the prison, an old friend of hers since her childhood, urged her to tell him what she withheld even from her sister. Rachel was obstinately silent.

CHAPTER XXIX.

NEXT day the ghost might almost have been forgotten at the Red House in the pressure of more immediate and painful thoughts. As each one of the seven days' grace passed, without hope of securing the prisoner's certain release, the burden upon the minds of Wayland and his family grew threefold, fourfold, and fivefold heavier. Each day brought its own burden, added to those of its fellows. When they gave the spectre a thought at all it was quickly dismissed as some fantastic trick of the brain; and, as yet, inexplicable though simple occurrence, if only the truth were known.

But Rachel herself revived their doubts on this score. The fifth day had come of her imprisonment when Marion obtained leave to visit her for a short interview. Indeed the heavily burdened elder sister dared not have left their dying mother for any length of time. As it was, she drove in St. Ermins'

brougham with the blinds down, feeling torn in two; one half of her yearning forward to the prisoner, the other imagining her mother waking from a now usual state of semi-unconsciousness, and perhaps asking for her feebly. Eddie was in charge of the sick-room this afternoon and was as tender as any girl, but still——

Arrived at the gaol, Marion found the poor prisoner no longer sullen but sweetly resigned. She asked affectionately after her father, mother and the rest, then dropped her hands wearily in her lap with an absent gaze.

“Ah, mother is very ill, dear,” said Marion. “If you are acquitted and come home it may be her one last pleasure on earth. She so longs for you.”

Two big tears rolled slowly down poor Bonnie’s face.

“You need not make my trial harder to bear, Marion.”

“My poor darling, don’t think me unfeeling. I am cruel only to be kind. You know we all believe you are keeping back part of the truth from us.”

Only a sigh answered her.

"Do you sleep well?" went on the other anxiously.

"Sleep? Oh, yes, fairly well. Better at least since I left home, than that last terrible night." Then with a sudden start of recollection Rachel laid a hand confidently on Marion's arm, "Tell me, have any of you heard of or seen anything strange—I mean a ghost? I must have seen poor Dickie in the garden the night after he died." Then, being glad to confide anything she might, Bonnie whispered the tale and relieved her mind by so much.

"Well, none of *us* have seen him," quoth Marion resolved to distress her sister no further. "And if it was Dickie, he must have come to offer forgiveness and say he brought his death upon himself."

"Yes, yes; in fairness I think so," Rachel answered, with a greatly consoled air which comforted Marion likewise. And so the sisters parted.

St. Ermins was waiting outside in the brougham to hear every syllable concerning his love fresh from her sister's lips.

"It is as I thought," he exclaimed. "She does not really believe herself guilty. But as to this

ghost, I never heard of one before leaving footprints. Nor does it seem right or reasonable to believe that spirits can revisit us from the other world without some cause. Your father is waiting for me at the station now, to go to London this evening. We must see Williamson Montacute ourselves and tell him all the details in our poor Rachel's favour. Take the gardener into your confidence and make him watch to-night."

What good might come of this Randall could hardly have told, but there was a knot to unravel which might possibly prove a clue. And he had none other.

The old gardener was willing enough to watch in the laboratory. Making the cunning excuse to his wife that the Red House cow was ill, he took a can of beer with him in lieu of companionship, and before three o'clock was snoring peacefully in the dark with his head on the table. Marion had taken first watch with her mother that night. Towards dawn she went wearily along the passage to waken Gibson. All at once she saw a white figure coming noiselessly up the staircase towards her. Her heart beat wildly ;

her hair rose, and with a low cry choked by terror she fell, to her shame, in a senseless heap right at the spectre's feet.

When Marion came to from her faint she was lying in her own room, while Gibson was trying to put some brandy down her throat.

"What ailed you?" asked the nurse soothingly, who was wearing her red flannel dressing-gown and slippers.

"Did you see it?" gasped Marion. "The ghost?"

The nurse started, looking round involuntarily with a frightened glance, but soon recovered herself.

"What ghost? I was fast asleep when you cried out and wakened me. When I came out you were in a faint on the landing and I carried you here."

Marion whispered how she had seen the vision with fluttering breath, but she found no credence.

"Come, my dear! you are overdone, and mistook a streak of moonlight for a ghost most likely. There! there, now, set your mind at ease and go to sleep. Let dead people be; you want your strength to look after the living."

Marion felt this last remark so true that in spite of the shock she sought sleep, and, thanks to her great fatigue, found it.

The sixth day had come. Only one more day and two nights before Rachel Wayland would be tried for her life.

Marion told no one of last night's incident except St. Ermins and Eddie, and at the former's request she begged Nurse Gibson not to betray her foolish night alarm to any one; thus making light of it. Gibson promised faithfully; in truth, utterly disbelieving herself in the story. She showed sympathy and reinstated herself in Marion's good graces this day, however, by being more energetic in help, more soothing in the care of her still hourly enfeebled patient.

"You are looking ill yourself, nurse," said the doctor that day in Marion's presence, "both you and Miss Wayland require my care."

"I have hay fever, sir, and am subject to it; but I shall have to be much worse before I give in from doing my duty," said the brave woman.

Marion in her own lassitude turned a weary eye upon her fellow-helper, and noticed with regret the

hectic flush on Gibson's handsome face and the purple stains under her eyes.

That night St. Ermins himself watched down in the garden without telling any one but Eddie of his intention. But no ghost was visible as he sat and waited under the weeping willow in the darkness, with the branches slightly parted. And at broad daylight, when rooks cawed and birds twittered about him, he rose, stiff, weary, and despairing.

This last day passed like an evil dream. Black care was in all their hearts. It was oppressively hot, the atmosphere was stifling, and the sun obscured. All the afternoon rumblings of distant thunder could be heard; but the storm had not yet broken.

CHAPTER XXX.

ALL day Mrs. Wayland had lain in a semi-stupor, from which she could hardly be roused to take a little nourishment. Marion scarcely left her post by the bedside, knowing that the end was drawing nearer and nearer. It might be delayed for a day or two, the doctor said, although at any moment the slow breathing, which went on mechanically like the ticking of the clock on the mantelpiece, might be stopped.

Towards evening Hilary Wayland's restless energy seemed to have almost spent itself. Once more he sat brooding in the study his head between his hands, lost in agonised self-accusation.

It was after supper-time at the Red House as St. Ermins and Eddie stood side by side at the draw-

ing-room window looking out at an ominous black mass of clouds coming up from southward, both silent, both with troubled faces.


"There is nothing more to be done, that is the worst of it," said the young man, conveying thereby the feeling of both that any action would be preferable to this enforced inactivity, waiting and watching for the morrow.

"You think so," answered St Ermins, low, with a slight compression of his lips. "To me there seems just one chance left, and it should come to-night."

"What do you mean?"

"Each time this ghost has appeared on alternate nights. Why? Let us sit up together this once more and see what comes of it."

As Eddie silently nodded assent came a great roll of thunder overhead, dying away in a long crackling roar; vivid lightning flamed zigzag across the dark sky. A few more claps and flashes and then the storm broke. The rain hissed down almost in continuous streams from the open flood-gates overhead; big drops splashed up from the



garden paths, where, in half an hour, great pools of water stood.

When bedtime came, Randall, who was now stopping at the Red House as one of the family, pretended with Eddie to go to bed. Later on they silently met and stole together by the garden door into the laboratory. Leaving the door ajar, they settled themselves, one to watch through the window that gave a view of the house front on this side, the other with his eyes fixed upon the gate leading to the meadow and the garden path.

Midnight struck from the church tower across the fields with slow and solemn chime. The thunder-storm had now rolled away northwards, leaving a clear sky behind, in which an almost full moon shone brightly. A wet heavy fragrance stole up from the drenched flowers and bushes that glistened gratefully in the moonshine after their long drought.

One o'clock struck. Still no sound or sight of aught moving except some night moths whirring over the grass and the sharp needle cry of a circling bat.

Randall's thoughts had wandered to the prison cell. He fancied the moonlight falling across Rachel's little hard bed ; seemed to see the beautiful face lying on the pillow framed in brown heavy tresses. Was sleep mercifully granted her, or was that young lovely being suffering in loneliness from the dreadful anticipation of what the morrow would bring?

All at once a hand softly pressed his shoulder and he involuntarily recollected himself, with a start.

"Look ! the study window," whispered Eddie in his ear,

It was softly, slowly rising. Then a white figure appeared at the window ledge, noiselessly descended, and moved with a peculiar gliding stiff gait—some-what like that of a blind person—down the garden path. Both grasped each other's arm tight ; both stared out into the moonlight.

She came—for it is a woman—close by the open door.

"*Nurse Gibson ! by all that is——*" was the unspoken thought in both their minds.

The woman was in her nightgown and bare-footed.

Her fair hair was plaited tightly to her head, as she always wore it; her face a little raised, and her eyes staring with a strange unseeing gaze before her while her slightly outstretched hands were clasped as if in pain.

Noiselessly she flitted by the watchers on towards the garden gate. Both crept out, stepping cautiously across the gravel path on to the grass which deadened their steps. With eager eyes and beating hearts they crept after her in pursuit, at about forty yards' distance.

"What does it mean? What can she be doing?" whispered Eddie, with a catch in his breath. "Did you see her eyes? They looked glazed—dreadful——"

"She is walking in her sleep," returned Randall in equally almost inaudible tones.

Across the meadow, along the path by the river's edge, stole the white figure before them, with bare feet, passing unconcernedly through wet grass and rain pools.

As cautiously the two dark figures behind crept after her to the edge of the wood. The scene of

Lady Macbeth walking in her sleep had flashed into Randall's mind as they tracked the gliding sleeping woman. Where the path in the wood curved they lost sight of her for a minute or two, so, on a whispered suggestion from Eddie, they dived in among the trees by a short cut.

Peering through the branches where the path widened, by the seat where Darke's body was found they saw a strange scene, by help of some rays of moonlight that fell upon the path. Nurse Gibson was crouched on the damp ground, her nightgown wet to her knees from passing through long grass and bushes, her bare feet scratched and bleeding. A low moaning wail like a continuous gibber froze the blood in the veins of the two who listened. It was a terrible sound, a monotonous murmur of indistinct words. She rocked herself to and fro as if in mortal pain; her arms were outstretched as if clasping an invisible form, and by her attitude one would have thought she was nursing something in her lap at which her downbent face kept gazing. Then she bent forward as if to kiss it, moaning, crooning, rocking herself.

They guessed what it meant. She fancied Darke's head lay in her lap; and strange thoughts of wild hope mingled with the horror in their minds!

Straining their ears, broken words detached themselves from the previously indistinct monotone of her wailing.

"My love—my love. . . . Dick—Dick—my handsome Dick. . . . Speak to me . . . it is Alice—your own Alice. . . ." Then in a hoarser voice, starting both with a fear of sudden detection, "*What is that mark?* Never say I did it—O my boy, my boy! . . . Dick, I never meant to do it. It was in my anger—O, Dick!—Dick!—Dick."

At last, at last, the moaning sounds died away. Slowly, as if cramped, the woman rose to her feet, and moved, still with glazed eyes, towards a tree close by them. Her feet strayed, as if uncertain of the path; but then, with that strange sixth sense of a sleep-walker, she once more glided forward straight along the meadow path and towards the Red House.

"What shall we do, Lord St. Ermins? What

must we do?" impetuously whispered Eddie, clutching his companion's wrist hard.

Randall had been thinking meanwhile upon this very point.

"Run hard first to the house yourself. Cut across the grass there; she can't see you. Get in by the study window and fasten it on the inside. Waken your father gently and bring him down. Leave the rest to me."

Ten minutes later and a strange silent scene was being played in the Red House garden, while those inside the house slept or kept vigil unconsciously.

Wayland and Eddie had come out by the garden door, and waited eager and vengeful in the shadow of the house. The white spectral figure was gliding soft-footed up the garden walk making straight for the study window, while St. Ermins stole behind it upon the lawn.

Arrived at the window, Gibson put out her hands blindly as if expecting to find it open. Her feet sank in the wet mould of the flower border. It was painful to see the unhappy woman staring with that fixed visionless gaze, and feeling, feeling, in her

dream, for the accustomed way to shelter. For full five minutes this went on; then it ceased. Slowly the dreaming woman raised her hands to her brow; then she moved her head in a bewildered manner as if waking. All three spectators instinctively drew back into the shadow of the house wall covered with ivy.

Gibson stepped back on to the gravel path—looked up at the house with a startled movement. She was awake.

CHAPTER XXXI.

ONCE aroused and recognising her situation, the late sleep-walker made a few hesitating steps towards the house-door. Then she saw the three men's figures lurking in the black shadow, and with a sudden movement of instinctive terror turned and fled. But she had only partially traversed the lawn when Eddie, who had darted off as fast as his long legs would carry him, had cut off her retreat.

"Stop! nurse. Come back."

"You! Master Eddie," gasped the startled woman, for she had not recognised her pursuers, "and Mr. Wayland and—*him*."

Then her first physical fright changed to a new mental one; she stood like an animal at bay facing them in the moonlight as they surrounded her. St. Ermins fancied he could see the dawning horror at being

captured in her dilated eyes and believed he read bewildered doubt as to how far she had betrayed herself in the woman's face as she gazed at each in turn, searching their faces.

The unhappy creature was shivering violently, what with the shock of her awakening and the draggled state of her thin garment drenched with dew and rain to her knees. With womanly instinct she had clasped her hands upon her bosom, as if trying to shield herself from the gaze of her captors.

Her master spoke first.

"Come indoors," he desired low, with piercing sternness. "Make no noise."

"I am coming, sir."

Silently the woman stole forward, a cowering, trembling figure.

Human pity for this miserable creature's terror of mind as also for her barely clad condition, overcame Randall's triumphant gladness at having at last almost discovered the secret at which he had been so vainly guessing; at knowing that Rachel, his love, must be innocent. He hurried forward into the house, and took down in the darkness the warmest long cloak

he could find hanging in the hall, putting it over Gibson's shoulders. It was an old red cloak belonging to Rachel, lined with fur.

Meanwhile Wayland was locking the garden door behind them, while Eddie groped for matches in the study, and presently lit a solitary candle he had found.

"Thank you, my lord," said the woman slowly, in a tone that St. Ermins never afterwards forgot. It expressed such gratitude as a lost soul in hell might feel for one drop of water on its parched tongue.

It was a strange trial scene as they three stood in the study with the captive in their midst. Gibson looked round at her judges with furtive defiance. On Wayland's stern face she read only pitiless retributive vengeance. The father whose child's life had been menaced felt no stirrings of softer emotions. Eddie, poor lad, had turned white as if about to faint now that the first excitement of the chase was over. A sudden nausea and giddiness obliged him to sit down and drop his head upon his hands. Whereupon a slightly scornful expression like the shadow of a smile flitted over Gibson's hard set face. But her

eyes sank as she met Randall's earnest gaze—solemn, sorrowful. The unhappy soul felt as if she saw the face of an angel, although what she saw was only that of a serious-featured gentleman.

“What do you all want with me?” she broke out first, her breast heaving, her face working. “I must have walked in my sleep, that is all. Let me go, gentlemen, *if you are gentlemen!*”

“That is not all, miserable woman. You have betrayed yourself,” spoke out Wayland in stern denunciation. “We know now why your guilty conscience has led you to walk in your sleep these three nights to that wood. This night you went once too often! You have been followed, overheard; for you talked in your sleep; your guilty conscience has made you reveal what you have been trying to hide—that it was you, and you only, who murdered Richard Darke.”

“Oh, no, don't say it. Not that word,” implored the woman with a hysterical catch of her breath. She pressed her hand upon her heart as if stabbed by the word. Slowly she turned as if feeling for a chair, then sinking upon it, rocked herself to and fro

Next nerving herself to a return
 added: "If you heard anything, you
 meant to do it. My God! I loved him.
 him so. That is more than ever your
 Every hair of his head was dear to

yet you struck him; and since then you
 the blame upon the head of a young inno-
 girl," returned Wayland, setting his teeth.
 for Heaven's mercy in putting us upon the
 track this night, she would be tried for her life
 tomorrow; condemned most likely to prison for her
 de, or worse."

"No, I tell you, no. Oh, it would never have been
 that. They would have let her off free because she
 is a lady and young and pretty. Oh, both judge and
 jury show favour to gentlefolks. Don't tell me to
 the contrary," broke out the woman in a torrent of
 self-exculpation. "Only for that I was silent, but if
 the judge had given her a longer term I meant to
 tell the whole truth out in court, so help me——"

A convulsive fit of coughing—though she bent
 her head, stifling the sound in the long sleeves of her

cloak—shook the woman. Then, seeing a scoffing smile on Wayland's face she seemed stung to the quick. "It is the truth. I am fond of her. She is the one creature in this house I care for, though you may not believe it. Why, she believed herself she would get off free, or why should she ever have told a falsehood and said she was guilty, hoping to screen you?"

"What!" all three cried, "was *that* the reason?"

Nurse Gibson did not deign a reply. Her white squarely-cut face regarded them all with a sort of amused contempt born of hopelessness for herself. Then came another terrible fit of coughing while she trembled as if from ague.

"She is ill, poor woman, get her some brandy, quick," pleaded St Ermin. Eddie, who was relieved to be of some use, slipped off into the dining-room, obeying his suggestion.

"You are stronger now : tell us all that happened," desired Wayland more softly now, but still judicially, when after a few sips the nurse seemed restored.

"Why should I?" she asked with a short hysterical laugh, looking hard at him. "It is only your

daughter's word against mine as to which of us did it. She was in her senses and I was not. *There!*"

"She wished to save a father whom she loves," put in St. Ermins very gently. "You have no such plea. If you really cared for the poor fellow who is gone—if you are fond of *her* as you say, surely you will be happier for making a clean breast of it. You must have been in hell during this last week."

"I did. You are right, my lord. You are a good man; and because you ask me I will tell you all, everything. They tell me you knew Miss Rachel on board ship—any one can see that you are fond of her. Most men are as bad as they can be, still I almost believe she can be happy with you. But there is no hope for my happiness left on earth, so they may hang me if they like." Then with a despairing look the stricken soul gripped hard the arms of her chair, and went on in hoarse rapid undertones. "It happened like this. When I came to this house I did not care to consort with the servants, and though I always did my duty by my patient, it's lonely at times when a woman is young and has her feelings. I got to know Mr. Darke soon after I came

by meeting him when I was out on a walk. After that we met often in the woods. He admired me—he was fond of me until Miss Rachel came home. Then I knew it was all over with my chances if once she accepted him. She would not do it for a long time because she never cared for him, but at last, in spite of my trying to urge her against it, she said yes, just to save you, Mr. Wayland, from the annoyance of debt. Oh, I was mad those days! The night before she accepted him I stole out and *made* him meet me at the foot of his own garden near the wood. I wrote to him such a furious letter that he came just to keep peace. It was a mercy no one missed me. (This was the night Rachel was frightened by Eddie as she supposed.) Then I prayed him in vain not to give me up for her, but he was so set upon her that he shook me off and would not listen to me, and that only made me more mad than ever. Then came the last day, you know.” Gibson’s breath came in short labouring gasps from her breast; she was struggling evidently against illness, but was resolved to end her confession. “You remember what happened: he took too much to drink that day, as he

often did. I did not much mind. I could have kept him pretty right, but Miss Rachel was shocked. When she broke off with him and came up to my room and told me what had happened, my heart just bounded in me for joy. All was coming right for me at last. But I stood quiet and only told her she was right and to keep to her word. I hardly knew how to get out, for Mrs. Wayland was fretful. But I gave her part of a sleeping draught in her medicine;—nothing which could hurt her. *It did not*—the doctor himself would say so! Then I just risked leaving the room, telling the housemaid she was asleep, and slipped out of doors and by the cross cut through the oak coppice, till I got panting to the wood and there I met him. Oh, I cannot tell you what passed. Don't ask me. Only he ought to have married me instead of any lady—he ought. I went down on my knees to him; I begged; I prayed. He knew how I had loved him these two years past, O, my Heavens! I had. But he only sat on the seat and laughed at me and jeered. Then he said some bad words. Oh, he could not have meant them for he was tipsy. But at that a madness seemed to come

into my brain. It was all red about me—everything. Somehow his stick had fallen from his hand and rolled to the ground at my feet. It must have been the devil that made it fall there. Then something seemed to whisper in my ear: ‘Strike him! Strike him!’ After that I don’t know what happened. It all seemed dark, and there was a rushing sound in my head. All I knew was that he lay there and would not answer me. Then I fled away back through the coppice by the same track. My only thought was that no one would suspect me—they must never know. Mrs. Wayland was just waking when I got in again. I made a fire in her room and burned all his letters and a photograph in a leather case. They made a smell in the room and my patient complained to Miss Marion. That is all I have got to tell. No one was more surprised than myself when the news came that Miss Rachel had given herself up to the police.”

One of Eddie’s few accomplishments during his short and varied career as a clerk or secretary was that of shorthand. On his father’s instigation he had been all the while taking down notes of Gib-

son's narrative. He now re-read them aloud, and the nurse signified her assent as to their accuracy.

"We do not wish to torment you to-night," next put in St. Ermins, feeling for the unhappy woman's condition of mind and body. "But can you explain us a few details? How, for instance, did the handkerchief come upon young Mr. Darke's face?"

"I will tell you. It is a relief to tell everything, for the matter of that." And Gibson raised her tired head with a pluck that would not give in to being beaten by fainting nature. Under other circumstances this coolness would have been admirable. "I could not rest that night as you may imagine. I remembered my last letter to *him* might be in his pocket—for he had only received it that morning. It would throw blame on me perhaps, for I had written all about how I loved him still, and for pity's sake not to forsake me for one that never cared for him; only if he was so heartless he might feel sure I would seek an early grave, and God knows I would not much care if only he and I might die together! So I got up in the night, wrapped myself in a long cloak with a shawl about my head that no one might

know me. I crept to the wood trembling lest any one should see me, but longing to look at his poor face again. I had brought some matches in my pocket, and though it was dark, where there was an opening in the wood I could just see——” She shuddered and added almost inaudibly—“*the body*. So I struck a match and found his pocket-book and my letters still there. Then the match went out and I lost the other one somehow. But anyway I was frightened lest they should be searching for him and see the light, only I could not tear myself away. . . . I just sat down on the ground and took his poor head in my lap and kissed it. It was some comfort. Maybe that is what has made me go back there in my sleep since. Then I took his handkerchief and laid it over his poor cold face. It was a foolish thing to do, but before the match went out I had seen a slug on the path and I could not bear the thought that it should creep over his skin. That is all, is it not? I will say it all over again before the lawyers or the police if it is wanted. . . . What is to be done now? Miss Marion upstairs will be tired out, and it is my turn to take watch with Mrs.

Wayland. I would like to do my duty to the last, but am not good for much to-night."

"I will watch with my wife," said Wayland very gently.

CHAPTER XXXII.

By dawn the police once more visited the Red House with quiet footsteps. As the sun rose fully above the horizon Nurse Gibson was being lodged in the gaol which already held Rachel Wayland. Both the elder woman and the tenderly nurtured girl self-accused of the same crime.

For the week preceding the assizes the excitement in the town of St. Ermins had been intense and ever-deepening, as can well be imagined. The trial for a capital offence of a young and beautiful daughter of a near resident and so highly respected a man as Wayland was a matter of gossip, hot argument, and pity, from the banker's drawing-room to the grocer's back parlour. But feeling was raised to fever pitch in the town this morning by news spread rapidly

from mouth to mouth that a fresh arrest had been made—some mystery discovered last night—that Miss Wayland would be cleared in court and the real murderess produced.

What actually happened that morning of the trial can be so readily imagined that it is not necessary to describe the details. Gibson confessed her guilt, her statement being corroborated singularly by small details. The police recalled finding a burnt safety match and a whole one near the dead man's corpse, for which, at the time, they were wholly unable to account. The dead man's own silver match-box had only contained wax ones.

As for Rachel herself, having spent the past night partly in prayer to be forgiven her sins, slight as these might seem in the eyes of her fellow-creatures, she had fallen sound asleep with the answer of a good conscience towards her Maker, and awakened calm and singularly refreshed.

It was hardly eight o'clock when her solicitors applied to see their client, having themselves been roused two hours ago from their beds by St. Ermins. She met them with a calm fortitude that only broke

down into great trembling and a gush of thankful tears upon hearing their news. Hereupon she made a clean breast of her own story—her terrible fears as to her father's guilt which had impelled her to save him at all costs, as she supposed.

It was not till afternoon that the trial began ; and the scene in the court-house was affecting in the highest degree when the tall slender figure of the first prisoner was seen in the dock. What followed was mere formality. The prosecution offered no evidence, and she was therefore acquitted.

On leaving the dock Rachel was seen to waver slightly and almost fell into her father's arms, who clasped her to his heart.

"My daughter, my daughter," he asked, "how could you believe that your father would allow you to suffer for his sake?"

"Forgive me, Daddie," implored Rachel humbly.

As these two embraced each other not a woman of high or low degree present could refrain from crying in sympathy, and sobs were heard upon all sides. Even some strong men furtively brushed away a tear, while the judge himself hemmed audibly, being

obliged to clear his throat on account of a gulping sensation.

Nurse Gibson meanwhile lay in the prison infirmary, being too ill to appear. She was suffering from violent inflammation of the lungs, no doubt brought on by exposure to the night air and through wandering barefoot and lightly clad through the meadows drenched by the late thunderstorm.

St. Ermins contented himself with a mere clasp of the little hand that was so dear to him, and one smiling look from the girl whose life, dearer by far than his own, his untiring zeal had probably saved. Gossip would be rife, he knew, in the town, and he feared it would be bad taste to claim his love in public, as she had so lately been known as engaged to the unhappy dead man.

But the westering sun that evening shining full on the garden windows of the Red House lit up a scene of home happiness and thanksgiving tempered by the shadow of the great cloud through which they had all passed and of a milder sorrow still to come.

Mrs. Wayland had almost seemed lost to consciousness for the last sixteen hours, but as Rachel's

voice strove to penetrate her dulled ears she strangely revived.

"Here I am, mother; you wanted me. I have come back," said the poor girl, pressing warm kisses on the pale pretty features that each moment regained slight vitality.

Marion came forward and with deft hands gave her mother a little nourishment. To her surprise the sick woman's gaze now wandered to herself and back to Rachel with equal satisfaction.

"You are happy now, dear wife," said Hilary Wayland, as, suppressing his emotion, he stood at the foot of the bed; "you have our Bonnie back, you see. We told you she was coming."

"Yes—happy now," faltered the poor lips that had for some weeks past well-nigh refused their office of speech. "Dear girls—both, Hilary . . . Rachel and Marion too."

That was all. But those few words of affection from her dying mother flushed poor Marion's cheeks as though she had drunk strong wine. It was not much, but it was all she needed.

Softly their invalid relapsed into her dozing state.

They had no fears for her now ; she suffered no pain and her mind was at rest.

* * * * *

Two days later the blinds were all down in the Red House, and those within moved with hushed foot-fall—their invalid had passed away from them to rest. And, strangely enough, almost at the very same hour the greater sufferings of a stronger woman within the St. Ermins's gaol were ended ; Nurse Gibson was dead of inflammation of the lungs.

It may here be added that on one of these days a letter arrived at The Wilderness addressed to St. Ermins and bearing South African postmarks.

"From Lady Wayland, I suppose," said St. Ermins to himself as he tore open the envelope. "It is five months since I wrote to her ladyship, and now her reply comes after I have found out Rachel's whereabouts for myself. What sorrow and anxiety she might have saved us all ! . . . Well, it is just what one might expect from her."

He was wrong, however. Lady Wayland began with effusive apologies as to what her dear Lord St. Ermins must think of her, with congratulations to

the dear girl who had won his heart, and assurances that for her own part and that of Sir Horace they received him with open arms into the bosom of their family. But, strange to say, his letter of earnest appeal to be informed concerning Rachel's family and home had only just reached herself. Some months before the mail-bag had been robbed and all its contents were missing. The thieves, it seemed, had carried off their booty to a lonely valley some miles distant from the scene of the attack, where in a lonely cave they had sorted out all the cheques and registered letters worth keeping. All the other letters with the empty mail-bag had been contemptuously tossed in a heap. There, open and half torn, St. Ermins' letter had been found after many weeks, and was then forwarded to the Government House to Lady Wayland's genuine astonishment.

"Well, the fates have been hard against us hitherto, my dearest," said St. Ermins as he and Rachel re-read the letter together. Then both looked in each other's eyes with some wonder at the strange accidents that had befallen the course of their true love. "Let us think of the proverb that it is a long

lane that has no turning. We have come to the turn now, I prophesy."

"And henceforth we shall jog merrily up hill and down again together like Darby and Joan," merrily added Rachel, with the brightest smile on her face that had been seen there this many a day—since that storm in the Bay of Biscay just before the screw of the *Oceana* broke.

CHAPTER XXXIII.

THE curtain has dropped on the play ; the lovers have been last seen joining hands. Why then, you may ask, have one scene more? Epilogues are as old fashioned as the days of Goldsmith. Nay, but the public mostly love to have one last glimpse of the playgoers, perchance grouped in a different attitude, even though they themselves are hastily wrapping and cloaking themselves to leave the theatre. Therefore, though you may hurry over these lines "an it please you," there are a few farewell words to be set down concerning some minor personages in our drama, and their work and welfare, also a last peep of Rachel and the husband she has taken for better for worse.

History has added to itself another year ; the earth is young again in a new spring. At The

Wilderness painters, carpenters and masons have been busy renovating the old house, which has lost its signs of premature decay and now bears itself bravely, as a home should where many generations of one family have lived, loved, and died, and filled it with memories of themselves. Its air of woodland gloom too has disappeared, for some too closely environing trees and rank growth of shrubbery have been judiciously cut away, giving charming peeps of heretofore hidden sylvan distances.

It is a lovely spring afternoon on which Lord and Lady St. Ermins are coming home; such a day as our poets have loved. And how much more beautifully and lovingly English poets have sung to its charms since troubadour days than those of other lands! Is it because our fickle climate and rain-charged sky too often cheat us of the joys of the May, so that when sunshine and sweetness do brighten the grey to blue we rejoice all the more rapturously? This day the town is like a hive of bees preparing to swarm, hum, and stir everywhere.

At the Red House the first signs of festivity are visible. The house door is garlanded, an arch of

greenery spans the road, and indoors stands Hilary Wayland, like a patriarch among his children. At his side stands his eldest daughter, his right hand, good Marion. She seems younger by five years; the look of care no longer haunts her eyes; when she wrinkles her forehead it is with an upward glance of glad expectancy, and her troop of boys and girls are flourishing. Outside is a little waiting crowd of servants and folk from the Green and the nearest hamlets. And hark! the quick beat of horses' hoofs on the road, and a carriage whirls in sight.

They are coming; and a cheer goes up from the crowd, led lustily by the old gardener, as the married pair are descried. Then the carriage stops and Lord and Lady St. Ermins alight, while Rachel embraces father and sisters and brothers with a gladness none of them have felt since years. For at her wedding, early last winter, the shadow of late affliction still overhung them.

"How well you are looking, Bonnie!" they all cried, for Rachel had never seemed handsomer. And St. Ermins asked with pride: Had he not taken good care of her?

"But where is Eddie?" went on Rachel, for her favourite brother was absent.

"You will see him presently," smiled Wayland. "But now you must both please to return to your carriage, and Marion and I will sit opposite. There is a waggonette for the children to follow."

So they did so; and when the carriages reached the town of St. Ermins there was a second demonstration.

The old town-gate was all dressed with flags, and the mayor came forward. He was the principal grocer on ordinary occasions, and nobody thought much more of him than that he was an obliging little individual nicknamed Niminy Piminy. But to everybody's surprise he made a speech of welcome that fairly brought tears to the eyes of many of his hearers. Little Niminy had a richness of voice quite unexpected, and, as he solemnly uttered the fervent good wishes of his fellow-townsmen for the happiness of the wedded pair, he brought the scenes of last summer vividly back by saying that as Lady St. Ermins had been a devoted daughter, so might she be a devoted wife, true even to death. At which

Randall St. Ermins straightened himself, looking even more proud and happy than before as he spoke his thanks. Then came more flags, arches, cheering crowds, all the way to the bleach-mills.

These lay not far from The Wilderness demesne, and as to decorations fairly beat all the rest. The gates were open and the yard filled with work-people in holiday clothes, while on the steps stood the new manager of the works, Edward Wayland. Proud and happy the young fellow looked as he led the cheers that stirred all their pulses and warmed their hearts' cockles. Then the oldest workman came forward. From a boy he had worked at the mill, said he, and never seen such good days as now, when, thanks to their noble landlord, they had new works and more wages, shorter hours and more hands employed. Go through the town, said he, to its most straggling cottages in the outskirts, and you should find happier homes everywhere than a few years back. And to the head that planned the new works, and carried them out, to Mr. Hilary Wayland and Lord St. Ermins, were thanks due, likewise not forgetting the young man whose heart and

soul, he might say, were put into overseeing that the wishes and plans of his father and employer were well and truly carried out. At which the cheers broke out afresh and Rachel's eyes were full of wetly gleaming pride to find Eddie such a favourite with his men, and to think that he had steadied at last.

What a day of happiness it was to her ! It was almost too much ; it was like a dream.

Then Wayland led them to see the works, and with his venerable face beaming explained the apparatus. His old dream had vanished in part, but a useful reality had taken its place. Only a year ago the chloride of lime used in bleaching had played havoc with the fish in the river, it may be remembered ; and how Richard Darke's anger therefore had been hot against the renewed activity of the mills which had so long remained idle.

But now this great annoyance was converted into chlorine gas, with the happiest results, and this same gas, passing through a primary battery, furnished strong electrical currents which were led by highly insulated cables to large tanks. The latter were

filled with water containing a slight alkaline solution, and in these, as Wayland explained, were plunged the stuffs ready to be bleached.

"Some of Daddy's dreams come true, you see, Bonnie darling," said Hilary, addressing his daughter with a glow of pride. "But you see I hitherto always needed a friend who believed in me, and there stands the man beside you."

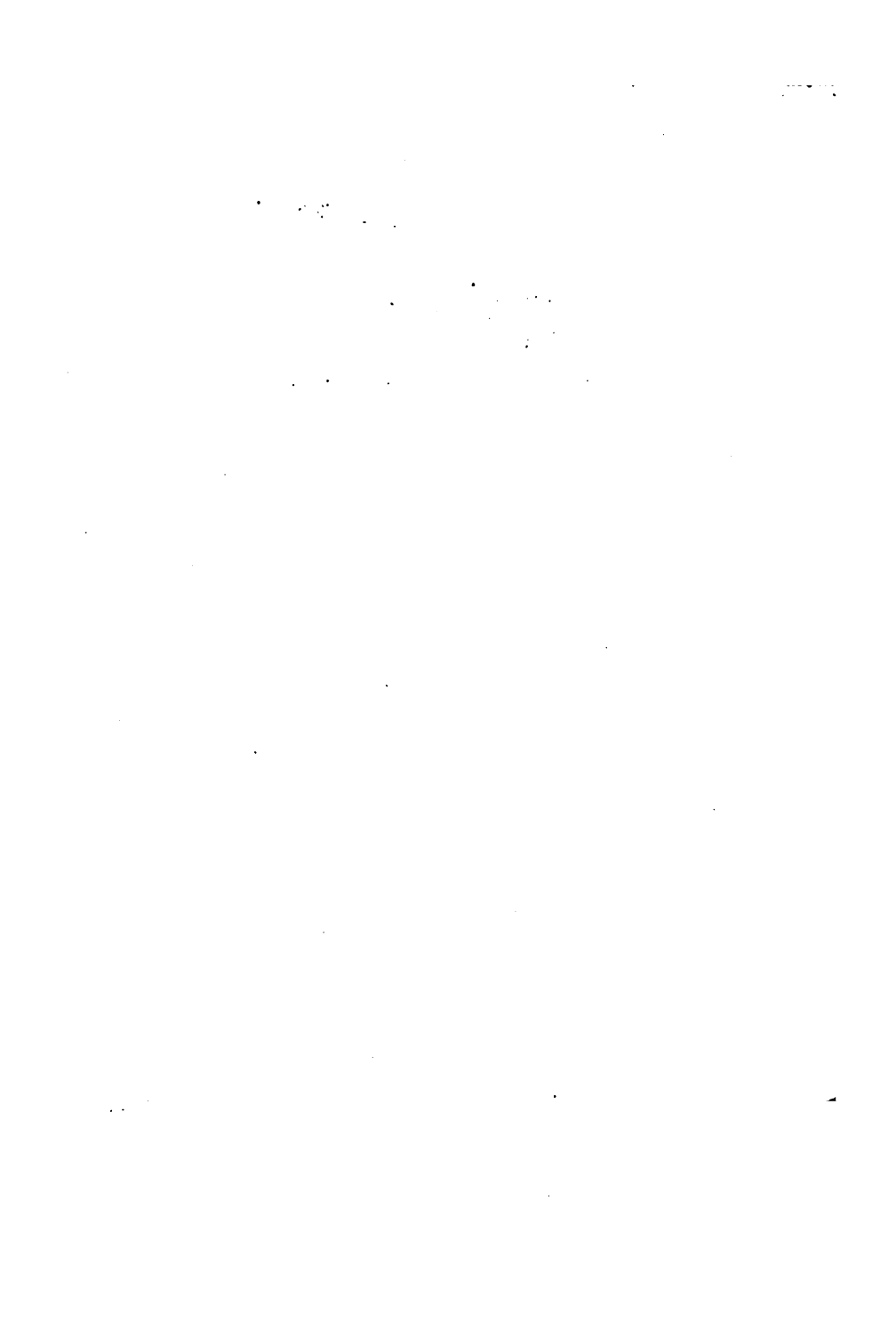
"He believed in me too," said she softly, looking up at Randall. "I am proud of you both."

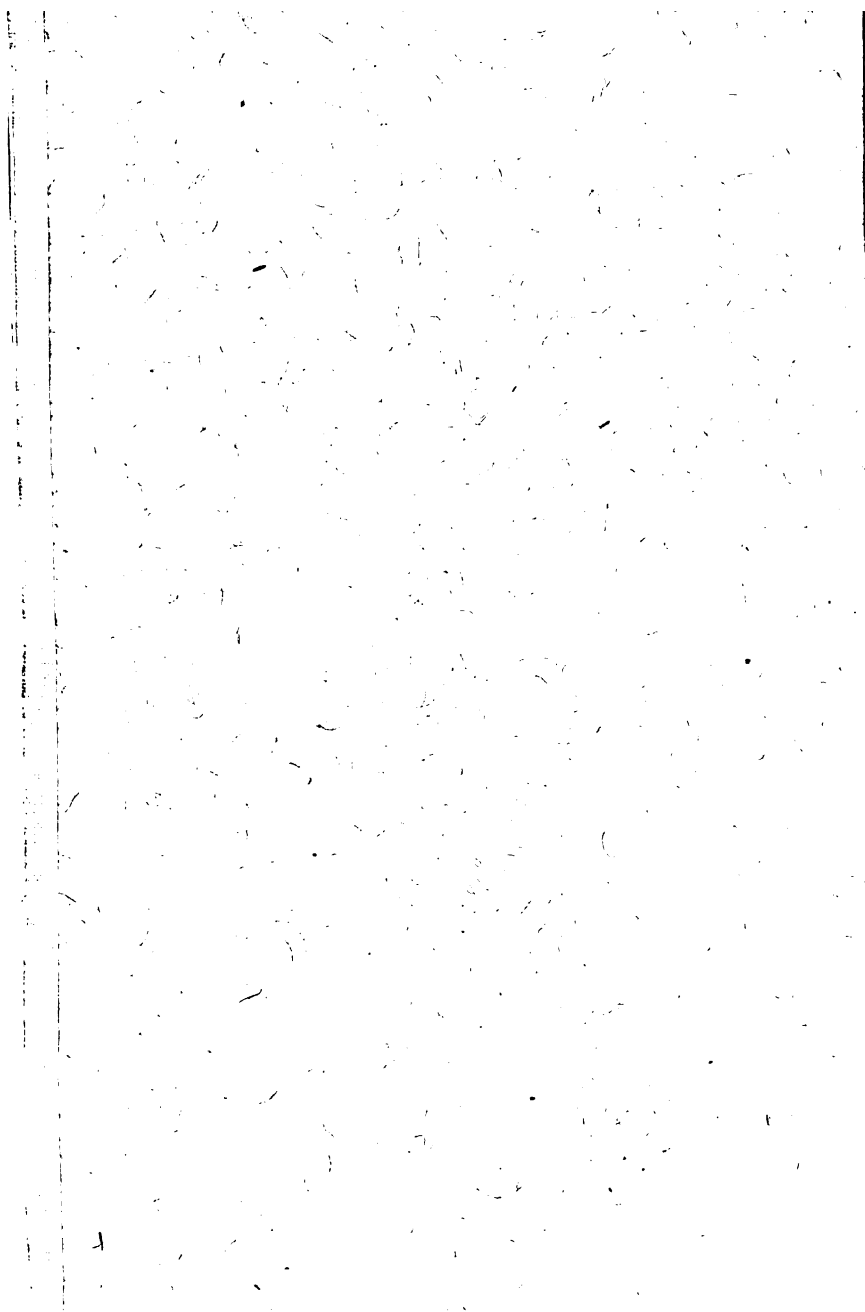
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